JONAS ČEIKA

HOW TO PHILOSOPHIZE WITH A HAMMER AND SICKLE

NIETZSCHE AND MARX FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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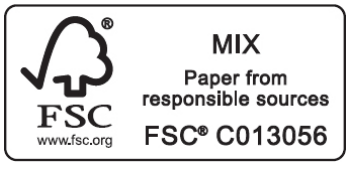

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Dedicated to Rachel, and my family in Lithuania.

Thank you to Logan O'Hara.

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Yet the earth is in violent upheaval with the need to create.
— Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements*[1]

Introduction

The way I understand the philosopher, as a terrible explosive that is a danger to everything …
— Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*[1]

I am speaking of a ruthless criticism of everything existing, ruthless in two senses: The criticism must not be afraid of its own conclusions, nor of conflict with the powers that be.
— Marx, Letter to Arnold Ruge[2]

1

Last year, at a DMV office in Florida, among several license plates displayed on a wall, one in particular stood out to me: it was an image of Martin Luther King Jr. along with text that read, “living the dream.” The implication was that, what was once for King Jr. just a dream, had now been realized, and no longer had to be fought for — an illustrative example of how a rebellious thinker and activist (who during his life was seen as a great danger to the state and was violently smeared and hunted down) is neutralized, made servile, turned into a legitimator of the present state of things[*] (and not just to the extent that he was turned into decoration for a commodity). This is accomplished by suggesting that the state of affairs the rebel was struggling for has now been realized, and to the extent that this rebel is still relevant, it is not as a revolutionary but as a friend of the status quo. This is what has been done to Marx by both social democratic parties, who proclaimed that now that they’re in power, all that is needed is a gradual reformist path to “the dream,” and large bureaucratic states flying red flags, for whom the arrival of communism was posited not as a process to be actively approached through continuous praxis, but as a far-off state of

affairs which will be established at some unspecified future date. In both cases, what was asserted, under Marxist pretences, was the lack of a need for any further revolutionary agency. This degradation of Marx for the sake of political utility led to grotesque contradictions like the USSR, a "workers' state" suppressing workers' strikes, or the German Social Democratic Party, a supposed "workers' party" siding with proto-fascists to massacre workers in revolt.[3] All of these statist manifestations of Marx had rivals who tried to preserve Marx's revolutionary potential, to wield him as a hammer against these regimes, but, over time, they were marginalized and conquered, and sometimes, to add insult to injury, portrayed as Marx's enemies, both by the open anti-Marxists and those who used Marx to defend existing capitalist regimes. This same vulgarization was committed against Nietzsche by those Nazis who proclaimed the arrival of the *Übermensch*[*] in the Third Reich, even when this *Übermensch* was characterized by two of Nietzsche's most hated things — a German and an anti-Semite!

2

In the popular imagination, reading Marx alongside Nietzsche might seem bizarre: aren't they so diametrically opposed to one another that reading them in each other's light would only lead to contradiction and confusion? The extent to which their irreconcilability has been exaggerated is only one of the many reasons to unite them, because it is to a large extent the grotesque deformations mentioned above that have created this exaggeration. Fans of Nietzsche have tended to be averse to Marx, and to a large extent, this is the fault of self-proclaimed Marxists themselves, so many of whom have presented versions of Marxism that are cold and inhuman, deterministic and vulgarly mechanistic, or statist and bureaucratic — all characteristics which *Marx himself* violently opposed. History has been made into an independent force, as if ruling over people from the

outside, when Marx emphasized that history is nothing *but* individuals pursuing their goals. Historical analysis has been made into a matter of prophecy, a deterministic metanarrative, something naïve which people can no longer believe in. Marxist action has been made into the activity of bureaucrats and party politicians, when it is always the working class itself that is the author of its revolutionary activity. Marxist philosophy has been made into a closed system, a rigid framework to force onto the world; and socialism has been made into a static blueprint, rather than the *process* by which the world is transformed.

But if we use Nietzsche to excavate Marxism, we can uncover all the Nietzschean aspects of Marx that have been purposefully denounced, overlooked, or ignored throughout the failures and deformations of Marxism in the twentieth century. I propose a Nietzschean Marxism, which, paradoxically, comes to be *more* Marxist than many forms of Marxism claiming to be Marx's direct heirs. What must be restored is the *human* element — active human beings, their lived experience and their most personal concerns — and there is no modern philosopher who provides this element more fiercely than Nietzsche. Our philosophy not only centres the concerns of everyday, living, suffering human beings; it exists and develops *through* them.

It's not an accident that when nominally Marxist institutions wanted to make Marx more pliable, it was often precisely the elements that tied Marx to Nietzsche that they violently opposed. One of the most notable features of Nietzsche's philosophy is its emphatic aversion to *servitude*, to being made servile, and it is precisely this that was targeted by so many enemies of Marx disguised as his disciples. Poor Marx, even more so than Nietzsche, has been made to suffer through many horrific surgeries and mutations. Through theoretical distortions and practical misapplications, he has been transformed from a thinker who wants to *transcend* modernity's categories altogether, into a thinker who merely wants to reform some given

sphere of modernity: a social democrat, a moralist, a historical determinist, even a nationalist. So many people have dedicated their careers to digging up Marx's corpse and making use of one limb or another, *not* to emphasize what is most powerful in him, but precisely to *neutralize* what is most powerful, thereby allowing him to become servile. He has been made into a legitimator of parliamentary parties and states, a prophet with a metanarrative, a preacher of justice, equality, and fairness, and an ideologue. In light of Nietzsche's rebellious spirit and aversion to servitude, it is unsurprising that he was so popular among Russian revolutionaries leading up to and during the Russian Revolution, but was then denounced and expunged the more that the USSR exhausted its capacity for political transformation — in the process of making Marx servile it is very useful to prevent Nietzsche from interfering.

In 2020, when the Philippine government held a hearing on a new proposed bill amendment, whose supposed purpose was counterterrorism, it listed Marx alongside Nietzsche as a threat to the state — this wasn't an ignorant move. A critic of the bill from Quezon City said that, given its ambiguity, it could mean that "[a]ny member, a student who wants to join a political organization, who wants to discuss Marxism, Leninism, Friedrich Nietzsche, and his concept of *Übermensch*, or the superman, is suspect."[4] Very well! The humour of such a bill does not preclude its reasonableness. Marx and Nietzsche are, after all, the two great giants of modern emancipation. They wouldn't really be Marx and Nietzsche if they were not considered suspect by most states. In the subtitle to his work *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche characterized his thinking as a "philosophizing with a hammer." So let us use Marx as a hammer, not as a legitimator, because genuine revolutionaries do not need to be granted legitimation. Value-creators of the future, they legitimize themselves.

When one observes all the ways in which the thought of Marx has been distorted and disfigured by some of his own followers, it becomes clear that it's as important to distinguish between Marx and Marxism as it is to distinguish between Jesus and Christianity, or Socrates and Plato(nism). In becoming formalized, codified, institutionalized, ideologized (as happened in many strands of the aforementioned movements), any thinker risks becoming a carcass. Every movement, as it is contaminated by opportunism, comes to be threatened by such mummification and vulgarization, which must be actively resisted, as this book attempts to do. Both Marx and Nietzsche developed philosophies that are by nature transformative, always in motion, philosophies capable of endlessly exceeding their own potential. But whenever they were utilized for the purposes of institutional legitimation, this transformative potential had to be stripped away. A document of legitimation cannot be transformative — it must be as formal and static as the regime it is legitimating. Thus, many branches of radical thought are kept from growing, others are cut off, some bent and broken, and still others isolated. Through the formalizing processes of the German Social Democratic Party, the Second International, and finally the Soviet Union, Marx was transformed from a source of infinite self-transformation into a monument — static in form and content. The turning of a thinker into a monument is equivalent to their death — as it is in death that one's potentiality is cut off and it is finally said what one "was" — reduced to bones, to the rigid and the inanimate. The thinker becomes a statue, and statues, as Lenin once reportedly said, are "for the pigeons to shit on."[5] If the statue is successfully established, its weight grows in accordance with its influence; and then, one must heed Zarathustra's warning to "[b]e careful lest a statue fall and kill you!"[6]

A thinker must always be something beyond your control — nothing pays them more dishonour than making them servile. It's the same with living persons. There is nothing wrong with finding a person useful for

some end or other, but their dignity requires that we do not reduce them to that usefulness, which is, of course, precisely what the capitalist division of labour does. We'll give Marx a hammer, but not thereby make him a carpenter. We'll give Marx a hammer to smash through all the historical rubble weighing him down.

4

This book is not so much an attempt at synthesizing Marx and Nietzsche. It is not, as has been done before, primarily a matter of supplementing what is lacking in Marx with Nietzsche, or supplementing what is lacking in Nietzsche with Marx (for example, combining Marx's critique of political economy with Nietzsche's critique of the ascetic ideal). Such a synthesis would risk overlooking all the ways in which what is being added as a supplement is *already present* in the thinker who's supposed to be lacking or deficient. Namely, in Marx, however scattered or limited, there is already a critique of the ascetic ideal, and in Nietzsche, there is already a critique of capitalism. It is not, therefore, a matter of synthesizing or supplementing, and more a matter of using each thinker to bring out what is already present in the other, but perhaps overlooked, hidden, or placed in the background. In analyzing one thinker, the other serves as a reference point for the production of a more detailed analysis. The goal is to bring out, by means of a cross-examination, the immense critical power already present in each thinker — this requires only a little push.

5

Marx is often presented, especially to people who fear him, in the following way: there is Marx the socialist revolutionary, but then, on the other hand, there is Marx the economic analyst, in principle separable from the former; in other words, one can separate Marx's analysis of capitalism from his

revolutionary politics. Perhaps this presentation could be defended on pedagogic grounds, but it prevents one from ever truly understanding Marx. In general, rigid binaries and oppositions tend to obscure Marx's dialectical mode of thought, which does not begin from strict oppositions such as those between the descriptive and the normative, fact and value, analysis and politics. Marx's theoretical critique *is* simultaneously revolutionary practice, and his revolutionary practice *is* simultaneously theoretical critique, and the one does not exist without the other. Not only does theory become revolutionary praxis when it grips the masses, but revolutionary praxis becomes a theoretical contribution when it tackles and transforms social relations. The theory and the practice are a continuous whole, and either one in isolation is necessarily incomplete. This is one of the most basic underlying characteristics of Marx's way of thinking: one cannot evaluate practical effects without theory, but one also cannot judge the validity of a theory independently of its practical effects.

Theory and practice. — Fateful distinction, as if there were an actual *drive for knowledge* that, without regard to questions of usefulness and harm, went blindly for the truth; and then, separate from this, the whole world of *practical* interests—

… The conflict between different systems, including that between epistemological scruples, is a conflict between quite definite instincts …

— Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (Note from March-June 1888)[7]

All social life is essentially practical. All the mysteries which lead theory towards mysticism find their rational solution in human praxis and the comprehension of this praxis.

— Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*[8]

When Marxism is reduced to theoretical propositions, no wonder the common individual finds it irrelevant to their lives. But Marxism is nothing if not *lived*. It can only be made active by the individuals for whom it is not a theoretical question, but a matter of their most personal concerns. Marx rejected all "purely *scholastic*" questions. Insofar as Marxist theory matters, the active, suffering, struggling individual is its lifeblood.

This is something both Marx and Nietzsche agree on: one cannot separate philosophy from its practical context and effects, from its uses, its functions, and its goals. Marx's philosophy is an immanent one — even when Marx looks back to the most distant reaches of primitive history, he does so while being firmly grounded in the present, with one eye to the future, never steering away from it. To abstract from future development would be to abandon philosophy, because its completion is yet to come. Nietzsche is no different. His philosophy would be nothing if abstracted from his goals of creating new values and affirming life, his anticipation of the *Übermensch*, or his impatience to give meaning to the Earth. For Nietzsche, a philosopher who completely distances themselves from all practical goals and aims is essentially a life-denying one, because they use philosophy as a means to escape life, to temporarily lift themselves out of the stream of events and contemplate some ahistorical problem from a de-individualized perspective. Such a philosopher is a descendant of the old religious ascetics, who sedate themselves through thought and reach out to the eternal heavenly realm, where worldly concerns are absent.

Even if a thinker intends to develop a "purely descriptive" theory, to do so independently of all normative concerns, evaluations, social ends and interests, is impossible. Any analysis of a complex phenomenon requires what is called, in dialectical language, a "process of abstraction." If one seeks to understand modern society, for instance, one's analysis will be constituted by a number of analytical categories (e.g., "individual," "class," "product," "production," etc.). The development of these categories constitutes one's "process of abstraction" — that is, the way one cleaves the world into distinct parts. Because there is, in principle, an infinite number of ways in which one could sub-divide and categorize the world, the way this is done is by no means self-explanatory. The categories we use are *always*, in part, determined by our practical aims and interests, according to the aspects of an object we want to emphasize, and not infrequently by the

prejudices we were socialized into. There's no escape from the process of abstraction, whether one is aware of it or not. The difference is between those who *acknowledge* it and deliberate on the best way to do it in a given context, and those who ignore it to fall back on whatever abstractions they find most comfortable and familiar.

6

There is no God's eye point of view through which to look at the world, no perspective beyond all perspectives, and every single perspective is to some extent necessarily finite and limited. This is an inescapable part of human experience. A perspective entails a particular point of view, a particular "eye" with which one perceives things. An *absolute* perspective, one of unconditioned objectivity, would, as Nietzsche says, have us "think an eye which cannot be thought at all, an eye turned in no direction at all, an eye where the active and interpretative powers are to be suppressed, absent, but through which seeing still becomes a seeing-something, so it is an absurdity and nonconcept of eye that is demanded."[9]

However, the denial of an absolute perspective does not mean that an approximation to something we would conventionally call "reality," "truth," or "objectivity" is impossible. In the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche proposes his own conception of objectivity, the gist of which has become increasingly common in contemporary academic philosophy — "the *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our 'concept' of the thing, our 'objectivity'." Objectivity, in other words, is not the *abandonment* of all particular perspectives, but the *accumulation and amalgamation* of perspectives, through which we exercise our "active and interpretative powers." For Nietzsche, the standards of objectivity are set in the battle between perspectives, in the relations between them, and as

objectivity grows, certain perspectives are subsumed by the more powerful ones.

If Nietzsche's analysis of slave morality is correct, then it is able to explain, on the basis of one complete and coherent conceptualization, the nature and perspectives of *both* the masters and the slaves; it is able to incorporate a wider range of perspectives within its field of explanation, and is thus more "objective," whereas the explanation given by the slaves can only make sense of their *own* perspective, leaving master morality to remain either a mystery, an aberration, or requiring an entirely separate field of explanation to be made sense of.

Marx, in his analysis of capitalism, proceeds from a number of varying levels of abstraction, but in a way that allows them to build atop one another and cohere, forming a tower from which one attains heightened understanding. Bourgeois economists can only explain production from their own point of view, emphasizing in it all that confirms their needs and interests. As soon as it comes to the facts of economic crises, scarcity in the face of overproduction, or the mass revolt of workers, these must be dismissed by these economists either as aberrations, or as caused by external influences that otherwise have nothing to do with the "pure" functioning of the capitalist system. Marx's analysis, on the other hand, can explain not only economic crises, scarcity and overproduction, the immiseration of workers, capital's historical origins and likely developments, but *within* all of this, *also* the reasons behind the perspective of the bourgeoisie. In other words, Marx's analysis can explain not only everything within the capitalist mode of production that bourgeois economists overlook and ignore, but also *why* the bourgeois economists overlook and ignore it in the first place, and in this sense, Marx's analysis exhibits superior objectivity. It accounts for *multiple perspectives*.

This sort of “increase” in objectivity, the combining of perspectives, once it reaches a certain level of development, is also characterized by the overcoming of petty moralizing, the overcoming of the instinct for blame and revenge. For the ascetic priest and the bourgeois economist, the need for punishment and the need for a comforting worldview mutually reinforce one another. On the one hand, their worldview justifies the punishment that they already seek to carry out against their enemies. On the other hand, their worldview demands, in order to make sense, the disbursement of blame and punishment. For the ascetic with the slavish worldview, everything that cannot be incorporated into that worldview, everything that threatens to undermine it, must be something evil — the very difficulty of explaining the existence of the aberration (why would God allow for such evil?) is seen as proof of its moral debasement. For the slavish person, one of the most terrifying things about the alien is its inner density, lack of transparency, the difficulty of understanding things from its perspective.

Likewise, the bourgeois ideologue, who does not have the tools to explain the fundamental problems that have accompanied capitalism since its inception, nor the fact that the majority of people living under it are miserable or dissatisfied, must have recourse to the identification of an alien element obstructing the normal (which also means “morally good”) functioning of the system. The bureaucrat, the communist, the immigrant, the Jew, the spy, the saboteur, the agitator, the decadent, and whoever else can most conveniently be turned into a scapegoat at a given time, a target of both fear and hatred, becomes the missing piece in explaining why such a wonderful system is so wretched. In this way, *defects* of their understanding and indications of the *incompleteness* of their worldviews are transformed by the priest and the ideologist into *proof* that everything alien to their worldview must be suppressed, indoctrinated, or eradicated, and that their worldview must be all the more protected.

In order to exempt the system one is defending from all blame, it is very helpful to posit the intruder, the enemy of the system, as one of two things: either as 1) an animal, a sub-human, a creature incapable of moral deliberation, or as 2) a transcendentally free, but evil, moral agent. Portraying one's enemies as the former allows one to explain why the enemy would attack or threaten something so wonderful: because they lack all reason, all moral sense, because they cannot even comprehend their own actions! The added bonus is that one can then use this classification to justify the wholesale extermination of the intruding element with no moral qualms. The second option makes the status quo exempt from its own failures, because the intruding element has made a *moral choice* — it is useless to look for the causes of their behaviour in the existing society because their acts of evil were decided in the realm of absolute freedom! (When you bring up the enormous death count of nominally capitalist countries, defenders of capitalism will say that those deaths are due to individual choices, not capitalism itself. In other words, they have recourse to the fiction of the transcendentally free moral agent. Of course, when it comes to nominally communist countries, the causes of death are suddenly systemic.) While the first classification allows one to punish the alien element without even requiring a moral justification, the second classification allows one to punish the alien element on account of their *blameworthiness*, i.e., their *choice* to do evil.

8

It is crucial to acknowledge the link between theory and practice, not just for the sake of methodology, but for the sake of one of Nietzsche's most highly valued virtues: honesty. I would hate to mislead or disappoint my readers, I would *disdain to conceal my views and aims*, and would rather make clear, from the beginning, the all-too-human aspects of my thought that many philosophers tend to hide in shame, even from themselves. This

is not a “disinterested” book, its contents are neither universal nor eternal, it doesn’t lay claim to an absolute perspective, and its interpretations are by no means final — indeed, I hope that one day this book will be obsolete. Like all philosophy books, to a greater or lesser extent, it is historically situated and personally inflected, driven by particular passions and convictions, and expressing a set of tastes, wishes and hopes.

Nietzsche wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil* that *all* philosophy is a “confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir.”[10] This is an observation of an unavoidable fact about philosophy, and it is just as true of Nietzsche as of anyone else. It is therefore not a condemnation of philosophy as such, but only a condemnation of philosophy that dishonestly *lies* and tries to disguise its own nature. The best that a good Nietzschean can do is exhibit the virtue of *honesty*, and openly *admit* the fact.

So, let me make it clear: the following work is an *interpretation* of Nietzsche, and specifically a *socialist* one (and, indeed, one could add that it entails a particular interpretation of *socialism* as well). That it is an interpretation should go without saying — after all, Nietzsche himself proclaimed that “facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations.”[11] This should not be confused with the absurd claim that *any* interpretation is as good as any other — a claim that is very popular to attack even if no one holds it, and Nietzsche himself would oppose it as a complete degradation of thought and culture. The point is, rather, that an interpretation can only come from a specific, limited, i.e., *human* perspective; and the standards by which its quality and value are judged must themselves be embedded in a perspective.

To put it in a Nietzschean way, interpretation is a form of domination, and to dominate an object, one first requires a level of understanding and familiarity with it. This alone means that interpretation cannot be arbitrary. To make use of Nietzsche without a certain fidelity to his works and

personage would be as fruitless as trying to catch a fish without knowing what to put on the hook. This is because an interpretation is only successful if it grips others and spreads, and for that it must stand on a nonarbitrary, shared background. That being said, an effective interpretation must have a dose of the arbitrary too — without it, the best thing it could do would be to merely replicate its object of interpretation, defeating the very purpose of the whole activity.

Any interpretation must also be, to some extent, *selective*. Here too, an interpretation without selection, one which leaves nothing out, could be nothing but a pure reproduction of the text which one intends to interpret. If someone claims that my work is not genuinely Nietzschean on account of its selectiveness, they will have to dismiss Nietzsche on the same grounds too, as *Ecce Homo*, the last book he ever wrote, was an exercise in being selective towards his own life and works. All active power needs to be selective, to know what is worthy of being preserved and what can be let go; one can only affirm if one is capable of negating as well.

9

The subject of this book can be reduced to five components: Nietzsche, Marx, philosophy, modernity, and human emancipation. The book consists of fragments, which, to whatever extent they form a continuity, all concern the interrelations between these elements. I have tried to write accessibly, and introduce the subjects at hand, but I do not claim to have produced an indisputable introduction to these topics, far from it. Rather, like all works of philosophy, it is grounded in a particular time and place, and driven by specific concerns. Throughout the work, I not only introduce concepts, but interpret them and utilize them — three acts which are inseparable. What hopefully emerges throughout is a particular way of doing philosophy, a particular way of understanding modernity, a particular way of reading

Marx and Nietzsche, and, finally, a particular route towards human emancipation.

* “During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes relentlessly persecute them, and treat their teachings with malicious hostility, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaign of lies and slanders. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to surround their names with a certain halo for the ‘consolation’ of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping them, while at the same time emasculating the revolutionary doctrine of its content, vulgarizing it and blunting its revolutionary edge.” — Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Ch. I, #1.

* This Nietzschean concept is often translated as “overman” or the cartoonish “superman,” but I prefer using the original German. First of all because the original German “*Mensch*” is gender-neutral, unlike the English “man” (and if the *Übermensch* would be beyond good and evil, it is fair to expect them to be beyond gender too). Furthermore, the English translations risk losing the significant associations with other *Über*-words frequently used by Nietzsche, most importantly *Überwindung* (“overcoming”).

I: Philosophizing with a Hammer

The Body

1

What does philosophizing with a hammer entail?

First of all, hammers are wielded by *bodies* — by material, living, *suffering* flesh-and-blood bodies. To philosophize with a hammer requires first and foremost that we philosophize with the body.

The history of Western philosophy was initiated by Plato, and his strict separation between body and soul. The body for Plato was not only *distinct* from the soul, but often threatening to *contaminate* and *taint* it — an excessive concern with the corporeal risked making the soul "impure" and "evil."[1] The goal of Platonist philosophy was therefore to cleanse the soul of its corporeal marks, such that, upon death, the soul can rise to the heavens without being weighed down by the physical. Plato, speaking through Socrates in the *Phaedo* dialogue, equated the body with "the bars of [a] prison house."[2] After death, souls which failed to purify themselves, due to "the desire for the corporeal that clings to them," would end up being "again imprisoned in a body."[3]

The Platonic position left a pervasive stain on the two thousand years of Western philosophy it initiated. The Roman Neo-Platonist Plotinus characterized the body as a wild beast, which needlessly fills the soul with pleasures, desires, and grief. Many strands of the Christian tradition followed the same attitude, such as Corinthians 9:27 speaking of the body as something that needs to be made into our slave. This tradition culminated in the emergence of modern philosophy, initiated by Descartes and his mind-body dualism. The body was denigrated by him as a mere mechanism,

following the deterministic laws of cause and effect, whereas the mind was exalted as something of a different substance entirely, capable of spontaneity and free will. With a few exceptions then, the history of Western philosophy was a history of the body being denigrated and shunned, or at least ignored as irrelevant to philosophy, viewed as something distinct from the soul, the mind, the person; something unruly to be disciplined and made to submit. It is in reference to this tradition that Nietzsche spoke of the "despisers of the body": "Once the soul gazed contemptuously at the body, and then such contempt was the highest thing: it wanted the body gaunt, ghastly, starved. Thus it intended to escape the body and the earth."[4]

In trying to confront this problem, Nietzsche did not simply examine the cognitive content of the arguments put forth by the "despisers of the body." That wouldn't address the root of the matter, because its source is not in cognitive argument, but rather in material existence. Nietzsche treats the denigration of the body as a symptom of a particular form of life, and asks: What underlying conditions of existence does the symptom reveal? This symptomatic approach to theory, common to both Nietzsche and Marx, is the reason theorist Paul Ricœur called them the "hermeneuticists[*] of suspicion" — when interpreting philosophical views and propositions, instead of treating them at face value, they seek out the underlying conditions and processes that might have led to such theoretical positions. Their theories concern, in part, the deciphering of symptoms. Nietzsche looks behind the symptom (the undervaluation and denigration of the corporeal) and finds, hidden beneath it, material impotence, lack of bodily power, manifesting itself in resentment towards the world and hatred of life. The symptom reveals a disease.

If one wanted to conveniently position Nietzsche in the lineage of Western philosophy, one could posit him as the *anti-Plato*. In Plato's famous allegory of the cave, the blooming philosopher leaves the cave (where the masses live in the darkness of ignorance) and climbs out of its darkness into the light of the sun (symbol of the eternal and the absolute: Truth, Beauty, and the Good). Nietzsche's novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which he considered to be his most important work, starts with a parody of this allegory: the hero Zarathustra starts out in a cave, but in the heights of a mountain rather than underground depths, and precisely in the darkness of this cave gathers his wisdom — his *anti-Platonic* wisdom. In allegorical fashion, this showcases Nietzsche's opposition to the Platonic mode of philosophizing. The fundamental limitations of human experience, which for Plato was a mark of an essential deficiency, in Nietzsche became affirmed as a beautiful necessity.

Accordingly, Nietzsche reverses Plato's critique of the body into the exaltation of the body. Zarathustra proclaims: "body am I through and through, and nothing besides; and soul is just a word for something on the body." The body, in other words, is not an unruly impediment for me to discipline, conquer, and enslave. Rather, I *am* the body — the self and the body refer to the same thing. "Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a powerful commander, an unknown wise man — he is called self. He lives in your body, he is your body."[5]

The materialism that Nietzsche expresses this way is akin to the materialism expressed by Marx, as he reverses not Plato, but Hegel: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."[6] The starting point of Marx's social thought is not human beings as souls, spirits, or Ideas, but the human being as "a natural, corporeal, sensuous objective being … a *suffering*, conditioned and limited creature" with one's "feet firmly on the solid ground … exhaling and inhaling all the forces of

nature."[7] Hence, to philosophize with the body means, first of all, to recognize the essential significance of the body for both theory and practice, which both precedes philosophy and guides it.

3

Nietzsche endured bodily suffering his entire life. From an early age, he suffered from severe migraines, then viral infections, painful intestinal problems such as dysentery, and finally seizures and strokes. From 1873 up to the end of his sane life, Nietzsche never got to be free of such bodily pains for any more than a few weeks at a time. Let us get used to reading philosophers symptomatically: the ill health and suffering that engulfed Nietzsche's entire body *forced* him to be inescapably aware of the corporeal. Through his lived experience, he saw the extent to which mind and body were inseparable, impossible to pick apart. Nietzsche's body repeatedly asserted itself, its instincts, sensations, and affects, and *demanded* itself to be acknowledged. Many of Nietzsche's greatest philosophical innovations were due to this bodily instinct, and it led Nietzsche to finally recognize that *all* philosophy, to varying extents and layers of disguise, was indebted to the body.

But the sensitivity of Nietzsche's body and the intensity of its affects meant also that with the illness retreating and the pain subsiding, the periods of recovery would produce relief so great that it would burst into intense joy. It is in large part thanks to these moments of convalescence that the cannon of Western philosophy was embellished with one of the most cheerful and triumphant philosophical corpuses to date. *The Gay Science* begins with a description of the emotions that such a recovery evokes: overflowing gratitude, the celebration of returning strength, the hope and intoxication produced by the sight of new horizons. Once again, given such bouts of recovery, how could one possibly make a crudely dualistic distinction between what belongs to the body and what belongs to the

mind? How could one make that split within an experience so undivided and whole? It was this bodily joy, the precondition for a gay science, that made Nietzsche feel an exceptional sense of self-worth: all those who denounce the body, who punish it, degrade it, who fantasize about a bodyless existence — in Nietzsche's eyes, all such sentiment became pathetic — how could it take hold when the body is capable of such great feeling?

Given the conditions of his material existence and the way he responded to them, Nietzsche could have never become a Platonist or a Gnostic — someone who not only sees a fundamental separation between the soul and the body, but privileges the former at the expense of the latter, reducing the body to a prison, a temporary holding cell for the soul. In the midst of an all-engulfing happiness, how could such a central element of my life, my experiences, my sorrows, and joys be removed from "me"!? What would be left? Certainly not anything that *I* understand myself to be! And not anything I would want to be either!

It was Nietzsche's experience of his own lived body that made it possible for him to see the importance of the corporeal where others disguised it or denounced it; his constant awareness of it gave rise to his uncompromising brand of materialism — a materialism that was *felt* before it was theorized. And it was this thorough familiarity with the bodily affects that led him to seek their role in history: all the developments in bodily training, discipline, punishment, torture, self-flagellation, and pleasure; a complete set of methods and techniques for the taming and shaping of the body, which only over time reach such sophistication that they give rise to the inner life, the soul, the thinking subject.

4

The difference between Plato on the one hand, and Marx and Nietzsche on the other, can be put not only in terms of their views on the body, but also as

the difference between *Being* and *Becoming*. Plato is a philosopher of Being, because he posits a stable, eternal, unchanging realm as the basis or foundation of the world. The everyday world we experience through our senses is one of Becoming — flux, endless change. Plato acknowledges this, but deems this change to be something deficient, derivative, a secondary phenomenon; the *true* basis or foundation of reality is for him beyond the senses — the eternal world of forms we can apprehend through philosophical thought. Hence, Plato subordinates Becoming to Being, just as he subordinates the body to the soul.

For Nietzsche, the philosophy of Being is fundamentally *life-denying*, because it denigrates the only world we truly know — the constantly changing one we experience through our senses. An extra-sensory realm is invented, whether it is Plato's realm of Forms, or the kingdom of God, or some metaphysical principle, and this imagined realm is used as the standard by which to judge the world of change as deficient. This, for Nietzsche, is the essence of life-denial — condemning the world of Becoming, because it does not live up to the standards of an imagined world of Being.

This life-denying tradition in philosophy dates back even before Plato, at least to Parmenides, who proclaimed *all* change and *all* sense experience to be mere illusion, arguing that *nothing* ever truly changes. There is, however, an equally long philosophical tradition of Becoming, which dates back at least to Heraclitus, fifth century BC. For the Nietzschean and the Marxist, it is with Heraclitus that philosophy *truly* begins: he was Nietzsche's favourite Ancient Greek thinker, and Marx considered him the greatest Ancient after Aristotle. Why? Because Heraclitus made *process*, *becoming*, *flux* the central principle of his philosophy — "Everything changes and nothing remains still … you cannot step twice into the same stream." The complete opposite of Parmenides. All the other pre-Socratics were concerned with determining the foundational ontological element that

constitutes existence — for Thales it was water; for Anaximenes, air; for the Atomists, it was miniscule, indivisible particles. They were all, in other words, trying to identify a foundational element of Being by which to explain the nature of reality. Heraclitus, on the other hand, posited not any particular element, not any Being, but *process itself* as the founding principle, which he denoted as "fire," due to the way in which fire constantly moves, changes, and shapeshifts, more than any of the other four elements.

This is why Hegel saw Heraclitus as the first philosopher to posit the *dialectic*, which constituted the first real step forward in the development of human thought; the first philosopher of Becoming:

> This universal principle is better characterized as Becoming, the truth of Being; since everything is and is not, Heraclitus hereby expressed that everything is Becoming. Not merely does origination belong to it, but passing away as well; both are not independent, but identical. It is a great advance in thought to pass from Being to Becoming…[8]

Marx and Engels found Heraclitus important for this reason — he was the first dialectical thinker, and even implicitly held an early form of materialism. Engels makes his importance clear:

> When we consider and reflect upon nature at large or the history of mankind or our own intellectual activity, at first we see the picture of an endless entanglement of relations and reactions, permutations and combinations, in which nothing remains what, where and as it was, but everything moves, changes, comes into being and passes away. This primitive, naïve but intrinsically correct conception of the world is that of ancient Greek philosophy, and was first clearly formulated by Heraclitus: everything is and is not, for everything is fluid, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away.[9]

Nietzsche wrote in 1885 that the only kind of philosophy he still allows to stand is the *Heraclitean* kind: philosophy as "an attempt somehow to describe Heraclitean becoming and to abbreviate it into signs."[10] We can therefore list another element of what it means to philosophize with the body: the body is by nature constantly changing, and our philosophy must

reflect this change. It must reject all dogmatism, all metaphysical systems that purport to be eternally valid. It must be a philosophy of Becoming — process and history.

> You want to know what the philosophers' idiosyncrasies are? … Their lack of historical sense for one thing, their hatred of the very idea of becoming … They think that they are showing *respect* for something when they dehistoricize it, *sub specie aeterna* [from the standpoint of eternity], — when they turn it into a mummy. For thousands of years, philosophers have been using only mummified concepts; nothing real makes it through their hands alive. They kill and stuff the things they worship, these lords of concept idolatry — they become mortal dangers to everything they worship. They see death, change, and age, as well as procreation and growth, as objections, — refutations even. What is, does not *become*; what becomes, *is* not … So they all believe, desperately even, in being.
>
> — Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*[11]

5

Marx and Nietzsche are materialists, but of a particular kind: precisely the *Heraclitean* kind. Many Marxists, Marxist-Leninists especially, interpret Marx's materialism as if it were a mere reproduction of eighteenth-century materialism, but in this they miss the crucial element that Marx derived from Hegel. As Engels says, eighteenth-century materialism "did not attack the Christian contempt for and humiliation of Man, and merely posited Nature instead of the Christian God as the Absolute confronting Man."[12] In other words, eighteenth-century materialism still subordinated the world of change to a principle of Being. But what Marx and Engels brought to materialism was the recognition of humanity as a *transformative and self-transforming subject*. Marx's materialism does not posit an ontological substance which forms the basic building blocks of existence, the way that the old materialists would — what he posits is not a substance at all but the *process* of *practical activity*. His is not only a philosophy of Becoming, but a philosophy of *praxis through and through*.

Throughout modern philosophy, the early materialists correctly perceived the passive aspect of life — that matter precedes and determines

consciousness. But the idealists correctly perceived the *active* aspect — that the subject has the power to create and transform the world. Marx saw the importance of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the fact that it "conceives the self-creation of man as a process."[13] In the hands of Marxist materialism, the active subject of the idealists became the *material*, corporeal, living human being, and the process of self-creation became the human act of production, through which human beings transform nature, and by extension themselves. To put it crudely, the empiricists saw history as a mere collection of dead facts; the idealists saw it as the imagined activity of imagined subjects. But Marx sublimated the two positions into a new, *human* materialism, from "the standpoint of … human society, or social humanity."[14] History is not then just a collection of dead facts, but the process by which human beings continuously extend their powers, creating and transforming the world. This is the central point of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, which is quoted a lot more often than it is understood. A similar attitude is found in Nietzsche, for whom the world is not a neutral lump of matter to be passively apprehended; instead, the human being's "needs as a creator invent the world upon which he works."[15]

Capitalism is a paradoxical movement: on the one hand, human powers and creative capacities come to accelerate at an unprecedented pace; as industry develops, capitalism covers the entire globe, making all of nature into humanity's "*inorganic* body."[16] On the other hand, capitalism simultaneously *obscures* the self-transforming nature of human beings, disfiguring humanity from an active subject to a passive victim. The peak of human bodily power is achieved, extended throughout the entire surface of the Earth, but in an estranged and uncontrollable form, such that the human being's mastery over oneself appears as self-domination. The inorganic body that capitalism built has created the conditions for infinite self-overcoming, self-transformation, self-affirmation; but in order for humanity

to take advantage of these conditions, it must first overcome its bodily alienation and reappropriate this inorganic body as its own.

6

Now that we have introduced the body, let us introduce Nietzsche's hammer. In his interpretation of Nietzsche, Henri Lefebvre says that the body is inscribed at three levels:

1. The empirical level — the object of study, analysis, science, which includes its functions, relations, and situations.
2. The socio-political level — the foundation of judgments, values, metamorphoses, transmission of knowledge, and re-production of social relations.
3. The poetic level — that which seeks unity and displays the body's riches.

If we inscribe the hammer at these three levels, we shall see that each one of them is relevant to this book.

At the first level, the hammer is the earliest human tool for which definitive evidence exists. Thus, its significance is more fundamentally human than all of its various manifestations. As Marshall McLuhan famously put it (although the same insight was already suggested by Marx, and later Adorno and Horkheimer), each new piece of technology is an extension of the human body — the glasses an extension of the eyes, the wheels an extension of the legs, and, of course, the hammer an extension of the hand. With every such technological extension comes an acceleration and amplification of existing processes and capabilities. The hammer is a great example because it is essentially a force amplifier, which converts mechanical work into kinetic energy and back — it is a clear case of a self-enforcing increase in power. It was the first known instance of humanity

accelerating its capabilities through the production of bodily extensions. Some would argue that, given the undeniably essential significance of purposive toolmaking to human life itself, this was the birth of humanity as such. And this birth was at the same time already a *re*-birth — the human, as soon as it can be identified, is already self-transforming, moving beyond itself, continuously changing what it means to be human.

At the second level of inscription, the hammer exists as a socio-political symbol. Throughout history, it has symbolized blacksmith guilds, families, political entities, professions; in mythology it was wielded by Gods; in folklore it symbolized strength. Finally, it gained a new significance as a symbol of working-class power with the rise of industrial labour. It was crucial in both producing and reproducing the social relations of every stage of class society.

But most importantly for a Nietzschean, the hammer also functions on the third, poetic level, in its aesthetic unity. The symbol of the hammer contains within itself every aspect of Nietzschean philosophy. First, there is the element of analysis and evaluation — "[p]osing questions with a *hammer*"[17]: Nietzsche uses the hammer to "sound out" idols, to hear how bloated and hollow they have become, and thereby to judge whether they are ripe for destruction. But this would be meaningless if the hammer was not then used to *smash* these idols into pieces, "under the hammer blow of historical knowledge."[18] The hammer is not reducible to the act of destruction — it represents both a destructive force, as it smashes and breaks into pieces, *and* a constructive force, as it builds and manufactures. The hammer encapsulates in a poetic unity the necessity of both — "Only as creators can we destroy."[19] Zarathustra says that it is through a "fervent will to create" that the "hammer is driven to the stone."[20] Beneath the ugliness of its rocky surface lies a beautiful "image" — the image of the *Übermensch*. Just as a sculptor must chip away at a preexisting block of

stone to carve out a beautiful statue, so a revolutionary must chip away at what already exists, no matter how ugly, to reveal its social potential.

Hence, Nietzsche "philosophizes with a hammer" not just to leave empty ruins behind him, but to use the object being destroyed to create something more life-affirming, more beautiful, more expressive of the active will-to-power. To summarize: the hammer sounds out the status quo to determine its value and its "expiration date," and once that value has expired, begins to hammer it through active critique and critical activity, building up the creator's vision using the materials provided by the ruins of the very idols one is destroying. Any successful socialist revolution must destroy only insofar as it reveals the beauty disguised underneath capital and the forces of production it has created. So the working class wields a hammer too. As "The Internationale" goes, "Fire up the furnace and hammer boldly, while the iron is still hot!"

In the course of destruction, the hammer must become therefore also the *war*-hammer. In this sense, to philosophize with a hammer is to imbue philosophy with struggle, and to imbue struggle with philosophy. To deny any search for "absolute truth," as Italian Marxist Amadeo Bordiga puts it; to deny any pretensions to "the eternal spirit and abstract reason"; and instead, to wield our doctrine as a "'weapon' for combat."[21] Today, the war-hammers created by humanity are of a self-destructive character. Human emancipation consists in taking the war-hammer currently directed *against us*, and redirecting it at everything that makes life into an unbearably joyless existence.

7

Nietzsche, more than any other modern philosopher, placed the body in the realm of philosophy, but there was, however, a danger in this theoretical innovation: as much as Nietzsche struggled to saturate his written word with blood and sweat, it was only too easy for scholarly readers to peruse

these texts and reproduce them without the suffering, without the bodily fullness. Throughout the twentieth century, French theorists influenced by Nietzsche made a well-needed inauguration of the body into the sphere of French philosophy, an inauguration which before had only been prefigured in certain isolated cases. But as this inauguration sedimented in academia, and finally spread to US shores throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it was inevitable that much of its vitality would become depleted, and large segments of the body of literature it produced would turn out lifeless and cold.

When the body was being initiated into French theory, the inauguration was truly christened by the events of May 1968 — a moment of revolutionary fervour in which many of these theorists actively participated. The French economy was frozen in a wave of spontaneous strikes and occupations, police repression was met with street battles and barricades, and a great mass of human individuals, in all of their particular differences and concerns, stood in unity, in their common rejection of a world that made life unbearable. Not only was this revolt a great source of inspiration for its era of thinkers, it itself was a philosophically charged event, in which philosophical slogans were held up by human hands and adorned the walls of occupied buildings — “Structures don’t take to the streets!” said one such slogan, attacking all philosophy that denied human agency in the presence of structural forces. Here, a new generation of theory was alive, not seated behind a desk, but moving across the streets, resisting police batons, throwing makeshift weapons, and holding hands in mass unity.

By the time it spread to the US, this wide set of theoretical works, soon to be labelled simply “French theory,” arrived at academic institutions where student radicalism was visible only in the ruins and traces of its former self. The decade of revolt was long gone, and neoliberalism was celebrating a new era of bleak despair among political radicals. Many academics, missing the radical movements that had waned so recently, and

still driven by an urge to resist, desperately sought to discover a new radicalism somewhere else. No matter how genuine their efforts were, there was only one place they knew where to look: academia. The paths that would connect the new radicalisms developing in academia with the outside world were rare, and not particularly revolutionary — their influence tended to be limited to small sections of the art and culture world, or theoretically-oriented subcultural youth groups.

In the discourse that continues in academia to this day, the language of "bodies" very rarely leaves room for agency, whether individual or collective. Instead, the term "body" tends to evoke either the cold and sterile gaze of the sociologist, or the careless and frivolous gaze of the media consumer — in either case, the bodies are flat and their affects dull. J.G. Ballard's novel *Crash* concerns this societal flatness: the way in which the postmodern media culture turns even pain and violence into objects of indifference, precipitating the "death of affect." What is most remarkable is that certain theorists, particularly Jean Baudrillard in his reading of *Crash*, came to *celebrate* this condition of pathological flatness and affect-lessness, this culture which can no longer take sensation and agency seriously. What Ballard wrote as a warning about the terrifying cultural condition we were entering, for Baudrillard became an object of fetishistic fantasy. The "techno-body" comes to be celebrated, but only as a textual signifier, disconnected from the *real, lived* body whose hand writes the text.

Of course, it could be said, in Baudrillard's defence, that his writing only reflected the flatness of violence that was truly fostered by the rapidly growing mass media culture; and given that Baudrillard was an analyst of this culture, his approach was entirely appropriate to his object of analysis, i.e., a culture itself suffering from pathological flatness. It is also true that the written word itself is inevitably flat — it would be absurd to deny that a description of pain could never match its actual experience. But that is precisely why *philosophy must always point beyond itself*. This is the

second meaning of philosophizing with the body: philosophy must maintain an awareness of the body as lived, experienced agency.

8

It is testament to the capacity of Nietzsche's thought to be shifted and disfigured that his works have often been used in support of theory that privileged the linguistic above all, theory that reduced the world to signifiers or resigned to their inescapability. Nietzsche, though undeniably concerned with the power of language, never gave into such fatalism. He consistently struggled with the limitations imposed by language, even more so by those of texts; he described himself as speaking with "lightning bolts"[22] and announced that "my philosophy, if that is what I am entitled to call what torments me down to the roots of my nature, is no longer communicable, at least not in print."[23] What's notable is that even if he could not communicate it, he nevertheless called it his "philosophy." The implication is that philosophy can be something *incommunicable*, something irreducible to the linguistic; in other words, philosophy, in unity with the body, can *exceed* language. As Nietzsche asks, "What good is a book that does not even carry us beyond all books?"[24] In isolation, the written word can only be as flat as the paper it is written on. It must be given life. One has to struggle to flesh it out, to make it full-bodied and warm. Theory is like a muscle: its default tendency is towards atrophy; it can only maintain its strength when being used, and it can only *gain* in strength when it exerts itself towards its limits.

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* Hermeneutics — the study of interpretation.

The Will-to-Truth

1

Nietzsche and Marx both agree that there is no such thing as non-partisanship in philosophy. To endorse a philosophical position is to take a position *in the world*. If the philosophical lessons of the body have been taken in, this should be clear. A philosophy cannot be neutral any more than a person's body can. The drive to deny this is part of what Nietzsche criticizes as the "will-to-truth" — the desire for truth as an ideal *in itself*, independently of all external factors, independently of the body and its instincts, as if truth is something otherworldly, something of absolute value, independent of all earthly struggles and processes; as if truth resides in a realm of its own, like the capital-T Truth found in Plato's heaven.

Nietzsche argues that the will-to-truth (modelled on Schopenhauer's will-to-life) emerged from a monotheistic worldview. If the entire universe is God's creation, it follows that everything within it, *as* God's creation, is to some extent divine, and because God possesses infinite and absolute value, *knowledge* of his creations is something that reflects this value, something valuable in itself, something that allows us to reach towards the divine. Thus, as the will-to-truth emerges from the desire to become familiar with the divine, it becomes one of our most foundational and fundamental values, and the monotheistic worldview presumes 1) that there is only one truth, just as there is only one God, 2) that as creatures of God, we are able to discover that truth, 3) that there is at least some part of that truth that can be known in certainty, independently of all changes in time and space, and 4) that this truth is inherently and universally valuable. The

truth even becomes something ideally *disconnected* from the individual inquiring into it: the individual, full of sin and imperfection, must hide themselves in revealing the truth, so that the divine could shine forth all the more brightly.

Nietzsche's goal is not to *devalue* truth, but to bring it back to Earth, to reveal it as something embedded in an entire network of human social relations. Truth, for Nietzsche, is one value among a whole host of others, and furthermore, something uncertain, ambiguous, often contrary to our will and instincts, and by no means necessarily divine — sometimes, the truth can even *destroy* us. The discovery of truth itself depends on the material circumstances in which it is sought, and the very process of seeking it also often transforms it. Yet so many academic philosophers, often so-called analytic ones, still engage in philosophy as if driven by the will-to-truth: in a manner disconnected from themselves as individuals and the contingent social circumstances they inhabit, without caring either for the sources of the problems they're tackling, nor for the consequences of their solutions.

2

Nietzsche's impassioned writing style is so alien to contemporary academia precisely because of the will-to-truth. In academic writing one often finds an expression of the will to deny the self, to erase all traces of oneself, finally to sedate oneself, the will to "disinterestedness." All this went hand in hand with the drive in analytic philosophy to expel and repress all theory that is overly and overtly critical, fuelled by a sense of the future or geared towards a change in the order of things. In the US in the 1950s, for instance, McCarthy's academic henchmen, fearing that universities were at risk of being subverted by communists and radicals, pushed academic philosophy away from the more ambitious task of a critical and reflective self-understanding, and towards problems deemed "timeless," "universal," and

“absolute.” Don’t be fooled by the appeals to disinterestedness, impartiality, or non-partisanship. Philosophy can be a political tool even when it claims to be at its most apolitical — precisely, philosophy as a sedative. Nietzsche knew that youth is a healthy danger — a powder-keg waiting to explode, and he saw in his own time how the fuse is extinguished with a stifling and overbearing academic concern for tradition. Nietzsche’s works themselves have been treated as if through a will-to-truth, with so much Nietzsche scholarship being written merely for other Nietzsche scholars, making even Nietzsche seem like a scholarly chore to sit through, a matter of obsessing over minute details of interpretation, in which there is neither life nor spirit. The moments of Nietzsche’s philosophy that strike the reader like lightning, the hammer-blows that uncover the statue underneath the rock, the ambition to make out of knowledge the “most powerful affect”[1] — all of this is all-too-often missing.

The American philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine, who is nevertheless an undoubtedly worthwhile philosopher, encapsulated the academic will-to-truth when he said that “[t]he student who majors in philosophy primarily for spiritual comfort is misguided and probably not a very good student anyway, since intellectual curiosity is not what moves him.”[2] Behind Quine’s denigration of “spiritual comfort,” which, despite its peculiar wording, is a reasonable thing to look for in philosophy, hides the fact that what Quine calls the “good student” also finds a form of “spiritual comfort” in Academic philosophy: the comfort of satisfying the will-to-truth, writing from the perspective of no-one, erasing oneself from the text, of becoming a nonindividual in one’s research. At other times, “intellectual curiosity” itself can become something *too* passionate, *too* curious, and then the student must be reminded that this curiosity has to be “*disinterested*.”

“Inspirational and edifying writing is admirable, but the place for it is the novel, the poem, the sermon, or the literary essay. Philosophers in the professional sense have no peculiar fitness for it. Neither have they any

peculiar fitness for helping to get society on an even kneel," writes Quine.[3] Very well, then we will simply have to distance ourselves from philosophy "in the professional sense," because what for Quine was a mere description of professional philosophy, for Marx and Nietzsche would appear as a *condemnation* of it. What Nietzsche says in *The Genealogy of Morality* about modern historiography, could be extended to the academic humanities as such:

> …its noblest claim nowadays is that it is a *mirror*, it rejects all teleology, it does not want to "prove" anything any more; it scorns playing the judge, and shows good taste there, — it affirms as little as it denies, it asserts and "describes" … All this is ascetic to a high degree; but to an even higher degree it is nihilistic, make no mistake about it! … I know of nothing as nauseating as this type of "objective" armchair scholar and perfumed sensualist towards history…[4]

3

Although there is undeniably much great Nietzsche scholarship in analytic departments, they almost without exception suffer from deficiencies generally attributable to the ascetic ideal. First of all, their style lacks the vitality that is in fact *inseparable* from Nietzsche's thought. Analytic philosophy as a tradition relies on a separation, whether conscious and explicit or not, between style and content. The content is what the philosophy as such consists in, whereas the style is a medium that is at its best when it is not recognized as style at all — it must be like a clean window, fully clear and transparent, through which you could view the content without impurities. It also depends upon a separation of philosophy from all other forms of writing, thinking, and communicating. After all, in many other areas of human communication, clarity and transparency are not inherently valued. A joke, for instance, stops being funny when the comedian goes on to extensively, clearly, and transparently explain it. Why assume that philosophy cannot have equivalent cases? To rephrase a Nietzschean aphorism in a way that rigorously defines each term and places

it in the form of a logical sequence would be to ruin, deface, vandalize the aphorism. Analytic philosophy can certainly acknowledge the existence and even value of such ambiguity, but it cannot *perform* it, and Nietzsche's philosophy is partly a matter of performance.

And consider the act of persuading, convincing someone to engage in some course of action. The convincing can become more effective if one is purposefully *not* transparent — if one suggests and hints, leaves things to the imagination, encourages the anticipation of surprise. And is philosophy not a matter of convincing? Sure, one may say that analytic philosophers care about persuasion, it's just that they believe that the analytic style is the most persuasive. But this is only true if their target audience is other analytic philosophers. There is nothing wrong with having a limited demographic, but one should at least admit it, and yet many analytic philosophers will present their content as, on the contrary, universal, universally addressed, and universally applicable. To separate Nietzsche's style from his philosophy is impossible, because his style expresses the affects underlying his thought; it reveals not just something about who he is, but also who he is addressing, and how; it expresses lived ideals. On the other hand, the analytic philosopher's reduction of style to rigour and transparency depends on a refusal to open philosophy up to the world, on a refusal to consider (or at the very least, select) whom one is addressing; it rests on resignation from practical goals and one's self.

4

It would be wrong to blame the aforementioned problems with academic philosophy entirely on individual academics, and that is not my intention. Many of them are aware of these problems and *suffer* from them themselves. There have been innumerable talented people who have given up academic philosophy because it was forcing them into a corner, or had their philosophical interests undermined by the imperative to "publish or

perish.” It is quite telling that Mark Fisher, who outside of academia became one of the most influential thinkers of the past decade, always felt out of place in academia, and started a blog to regain interest in writing “after the traumatic experience of doing a PhD.”[5]

The problems with academia are largely an inevitable outcome of the intellectual division of labour, which shuns all philosophers whose eyes try to look from too high up or to capture a perspective too wide; a division of labour which forces academics to specialize in *crumbs* — and nothing inspired ever came out of chewing on crumbs. The principle of “publish or perish” often prevents academics from writing even for the sake of the will-to-truth, let alone for the sake of life; one is forced to write only to feed the very academic machine that lords over us, while giving us less and less. It is clear that a problem is present, when even anti-Academic philosophers (such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) are processed to produce scholarship that regularly finds no audience outside of academia itself. Academic philosophy becomes a self-reinforcing system from which nothing can escape and nothing can get in. Is it any wonder that so much popular opinion sees in it something useless or inferior? Even the most passionate lover of wisdom could be persuaded to abandon it by academia.

This is why many of the best philosophers, wherever has been possible, came from outside academia, including Marx and Nietzsche. Marx was rejected from academia because his political views were too radical and instead found a clue to the realization of philosophy *outside* academia. Nietzsche was a professor of the dying field of philology, for which he was too adventurous and not complacent enough, and the posts of academic philosophy found him too eccentric and not technically knowledgeable enough. But what was the outcome of their being ill-fitted for academia? Nietzsche not only outlived the academic field that judged him to be deficient, he also became more significant than his field ever was. Marx, on

the other hand, achieved a level of global political influence undreamt of by most academic political theorists and economists.

> The fragmentation of existence together with the partial and one-sided character of socialization under capitalism have inclined people to focus on the particulars that enter their lives—an individual, a job, a place—but to ignore the ways they are related, and thus to miss the patterns … that emerge from these relations. More recently, the social sciences have reinforced this tendency by breaking up the whole of human knowledge into the specialized learning of competing disciplines, each with its own distinctive language, and then by studying almost exclusively those bits that permit statistical manipulation. In the process, capitalism, the biggest pattern of all and one whose effect on people's lives is constantly growing, has become virtually invisible.
>
> — Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*[6]

This problem Bertell Ollman is describing has sometimes been called the "knowledge-ignorance paradox," wherein the growth of specialized knowledge is accompanied by a simultaneous increase in ignorance. Specialization may be necessary, but if everyone is a specialist, who will study the whole? Who will identify the totality within which all specialized knowledge is constrained? It is one of modernity's ironies that modern academic scholars are often the least suited to recognize the modern condition.

Because Marx and Nietzsche were not constrained by the academic division of labour, they were able to view things in their interconnections, their interdependent relations, even those which transcended disciplines — in short, they were able to seek *totality*; and they were able to situate this totality in historical developments, in ongoing tendencies, in the flux and direction of things, producing two of the most vital and influential accounts of modernity to this day.

Given also their lack of submission to academic conventions, they wrote not just for other philosophers, or political theorists, or economists, or, God-forbid, philologists. In transcending such convictions, they wrote for the *modern human being*. Only in this way could they influence everything from philosophy and social science to culture and art.

Their theoretical accounts were not developed just for the sake of theory — contained within them was an anticipation of the future, a human being's likely role in it, and even a host of weapons to fight for it. It was, without a doubt, Marx that went the furthest. The criticism *of* weapons for him had to culminate in criticism *by* weapons, and having uncovered both the ongoing social developments and the weapons used to suppress or accelerate them, he then went on to realize those weapons in practice. Despite the eventual deformations and distortions of Marxism, despite its transformation into an ideology, despite its abuse by counter-revolution, Marx posthumously showed what it means for theory to *be* praxis, to serve life, when workers around the globe, thousands of whom were influenced and inspired by Marx, in the course of the first global revolutionary wave in history (1917-1923), made the ruling classes of the whole Earth tremble. When Germany, despite impending military defeat, sought to continue the war, it was the revolt and self-organization of soldiers and workers which decisively forced it to surrender, ending the First World War.

Of course, it would be unfair to hold academics to the standard of influence reached by Marx in the workers' movements of the twentieth century, but the point is that academia, built as it is around the will-to-truth, is *structurally incapable* of generating such influence.[*] If capitalism is ever overthrown, the precedents of revolution will not come from dry scholarship; and furthermore, the overcoming of capitalism entails the overcoming of the division of labour, and academia with it. Not, of course, in the sense that people in a post-capitalist society would no longer think, read, study, or research — they would do all those things, just with much greater interest and joy, because, no longer in the grip of the current-day institutional structure, they would engage in these activities not as a distinct class of people labelled "academics," but as human beings.

Those who understand science in terms of the will-to-truth see it almost as something disembodied, separate from the rest of human life, as if occupying a realm of its own. But it is not the will-to-truth that primarily drives and guides science today. It is at best a by-product. One should remember that science is a *social* activity, embedded in the rest of society like *all* human affairs. Even something as ancient and basic as geometry, which Plato saw as a prime example of extra-sensory, otherworldly knowledge, in fact developed due to definite social, practical needs and property relations — it arose in Ancient Egypt to measure and preserve the layout of farmland ownership after floods. Modern science requires funding, in resources and capital, and because of this is inseparable from the history of the development of capitalism. The scientific study of thermodynamics cannot be separated from the rise of industrial capitalism or from the role of the steam engine in production, just as quantum physics cannot be separated from the role of quantum computation in the capitalism of the information age. Science, in other words, is a human *power*, an extension of the human body like the hammer, and therefore necessarily embedded in life. "*Industry*," Marx writes, "is the *actual*, historical relationship of nature, and therefore of natural science, to man." It is the "*exoteric* revelation of man's *essential powers*."[7]

This does not mean that one should *mistrust* science, but, recognizing it as a human power, one should ask *who wields it*. It is obvious that it is not wielded by those who still starve, those who lack shelter, sanitation, or clean water, while scientific advancements capable of solving these problems have been made. It is not wielded by the scientists themselves either, as they are nothing without the capital that provides them with the means for such science. It is, rather, *capital* that wields science. Science is a human power that has become alienated and estranged from human beings. It is precisely because of the domination of capital that it today acquires the

appearance of something separate from the rest of human society, a monolith, in a domain entirely of its own.

If, instead, we recognize science as the expression of human power that it is, “we also gain an understanding of the human essence of nature or the natural essence of man.” If we rescue science from capital, reappropriate it on a human basis, i.e. place it under human control, then “natural science will lose its abstractly material — or rather, its idealistic — tendency, and will become the basis of *human science*, as it has already become — albeit in an estranged form — the basis of actual human life, and to assume *one* basis for life and a different basis for *science* is as a matter of course a lie.”[8] Nietzsche anticipates the same development, in which science will lose its inhuman and abstract character, “when artistic energies and the practical wisdom of life join with scientific thought so that a higher organic system will develop in relation to which the scholar, the physician, the artist, and the lawmaker, as we now know them would have to appear as paltry antiquities!”[9]

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* As a counterargument, one could point to the 1968 uprisings in France, which were kicked off by student protests and occupations. However, they were successful precisely in *resisting* the existing institutional structure, defying the academic division of labour, and occupying schools in an act of self-determination.

Modernity

1

[*Beyond Good and Evil*] (1886) is in essence a critique of modernity, including modern science, modern art — even modern politics —, along with indications of an opposite type who is as un-modern as possible, a noble, affirmative type.

— Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*[1]

In our days, everything seems pregnant with its contrary: Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it; The newfangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, are turned into sources of want; The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character.

At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy. Even the pure light of science seems unable to shine but on the dark background of ignorance. All our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life, and stultifying human life into a material force.

— Marx, Speech at anniversary of the *People's Paper*[2]

Philosophy, like life, must be situated, and because we are all, in this moment, situated in the "modern world," philosophy today has to address modernity. This is not to say that all philosophy must be equally concerned with modernity, with its social, political, and economic conditions, but ignoring them will necessarily leave a gap in one's self-understanding. (Trying to understand contemporary philosophy without reference to the social facts of modernity would be as fruitless as trying to understand medieval Western philosophy without reference to the social power of the medieval Christian church.) Marx and Nietzsche are critics of modernity *par excellence* — this is one of the many reasons for their significance. Their approach to political philosophy is nothing like Plato's or John

Rawls', who inquire beyond time and place, beyond history, in an attempt to discover eternal and absolute social laws or ideals. Instead, they historicize, excavate, examine social symptoms and dive into the depths of the modern social condition, always from the standpoint of immanent practice — they are aware of how *their thought itself* is shaped by the conditions which they analyze. They have no interest in identifying an eternal transhistorical realm or devising a blueprint for an ideal society. They grew out of modernity, grasped it, and will be overcome along with it. The ultimate goal of a reader of both Marx and Nietzsche is to overcome them, render them obsolete, by overcoming modernity. This entails refusing to reduce them to a scholarly exercise and instead realizing them in *praxis*. Nietzsche's philosophy is nothing if not a means to invigorate life, and Marx's is nothing if not an attempt to render theory into a material force.

2

But what is modernity? It is often described in terms of what Nietzsche calls the "death of God," which is not a theological proposition, nor even a proposition about religion in general, but a proclamation that the Western world no longer has a metanarrative, a founding myth, an overarching story through which it could make sense of itself and give its existence meaning. The self-understanding of the modern human being is therefore uncertain, insecure, less embedded in cultural practices. Others characterize modernity as the transgression of various previously existing national and traditional boundaries. One can also point to the emergence of mass society, industry, and modern science, the growing rationalization and commercialization of society, and its accompanying social atomization. All these characterizations undeniably point to something correct, but I want to emphasize something underlying these characteristics, more general than them — modernity as I define it consists of three elements that both Marx and Nietzsche identify as essential to the condition they analyze.

First of all, modernity is characterized by the fact that humanity's own creations assume a power beyond our control, independent of any particular individual or group of individuals, and come to confront us as an external power, dominating over us; capital for Marx, and the ascetic ideal for Nietzsche.

Capital, by its very nature, accumulates and expands. It induces all capitalists to follow the dictates of the market on pain of going bankrupt and being ejected from it. Capital, as financial investment, is *in essence* geared towards profit-maximization. The reason companies can be successful at all is because they place the maximization of profits above all other concerns — their entire set-up is built for this purpose. And even if a saintly CEO suddenly decided to abandon concerns for profit-maximization, and somehow succeeded in prioritizing ethical matters despite all shareholders and investors involved, the company's status in the world market would plummet until it became outcompeted, closed down, or bought up. Someone else would quickly take their place. It is not entirely correct therefore to say that capitalists determine the fate of our social lives — it is *capital* that does, and capitalists are only its individual agents, in principle replaceable and disposable like the workers. Even the greediest oil baron would prefer to avoid climate disaster, but the social relations of capital escape all rational planning and control, even when they come to threaten human life. Rather than humanity controlling capital, it is capital that controls humanity. As the *Communist Manifesto* puts it, bourgeois society "is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells."[3] This is why modernity is coterminous with the threat of human self-destruction: phenomena like nuclear warfare and catastrophic climate change are the clearest examples of the way in which we are threatened by our own powers, dominated by our own creations. Hence, as the COVID pandemic led to a conflict between the need for safety regulations and the needs of the

economy, capital appeared explicitly as a wrathful God demanding human sacrifice, calling for bodies to be piled up high for its endless hunger.

The ascetic ideal analyzed by Nietzsche has the same characteristic. Here, what starts as customary norms established for the sake of social utility, and moral ideals propagated by priests as a way of exerting power, becomes obscured and sublimated. As the priestly ideal comes to be *internalized* by the modern person, it forgets its own origins and functions, and acquires the character of something eternal and absolute. The development of the ascetic ideal first began because people in increasingly tightly knit societies had to exhibit the self-control and psychological restraint which was required for the sake of social stability and cooperation. But with the emergence of the notions of guilt and sin, self-discipline and self-denial came to be pursued for their own sake, as something that people *deserve* by virtue of being sinners. The ascetic ideal grew into something independent of social utility, independent even of the interests of those promoting it; it became lodged internally within the subject, grounding its self-conception. Cloaking the culture at large, it came to be experienced as transcending the material world as such. Truly, in a sense the ascetic ideal even *becomes* transcendent, in that its effectiveness no longer depends on an active priestly or moralizing class, but acquires the form of an independent, impersonal force. What does this entail? That everyone today, no matter how secularized, is subject to feelings of guilt and sin, contaminated with the drive to moralize against both oneself and others.

Both capitalism and the ascetic ideal, in other words, despite being the creation of human beings, come to operate *despite* them and *against* them, turning against human life itself, constantly preventing its enjoyment and affirmation. Rather than industry being an extension of human powers, humans become a mere extension of the powers of industry. And human power as such becomes subordinated to ascetic self-denial.

Secondly, modernity is characterized by the reversal between *means and ends*. The wage worker spends the absolute majority of their life engaging in activity that they find no inherent value in, and that is pursued only as a means, only *instrumentally*. As Marx writes, "[t]he only connection which still links them with the productive forces and with their own existence — labour — has lost all semblance of self-activity and only sustains their life by stunting it … material life appears as the end, and what produces this material life, labour (which is now the only possible but, as we see, negative form of self-activity), as the means."[4] Or, in more compact form: "Life itself appears only as a *means to life*."[5] Likewise, the ascetic ideal as analyzed by Nietzsche gives people a sense of meaning only by denigrating life, by making people into guilt-ridden sinners, such that humans seek power only as a means to the ascetic ideal; Nietzsche poses this objection to "all philosophic-moralistic cosmologies and theodicies, to all *wherefores* and *highest values* in philosophy and theology hitherto. One kind of means has been misunderstood as an end; conversely, life and the enhancement of its power has been debased as a means."[6] Self-discipline can be an immensely powerful tool for self-overcoming and empowerment, but the ascetic ideal, through a society-wide nihilism, converts it into an end-in-itself, such that people are taught to self-flagellate *for the sake of it*. Morality, which originally developed as a set of customary rules for the organization of effective and successful communal life, comes to be fetishized as possessing a power of its own (just like commodities), and is adhered to even when it becomes actively *harmful*. Conversely, power, life and its enhancement, which should be sought out as valuable in-themselves, are denigrated, stripped of their value, and praised only insofar as they empower forces opposed to humanity — the demands of abstract morality.

Capital, which starts out as a *means* to the production of goods, comes to grow to the point of becoming an *end in itself*, making production into a mere means for the accumulation of capital. Likewise, morality and

asceticism, which start out as a *means* to the preservation and enhancement of life, become an end in itself, such that the enhancement of life, the growth of power, become a mere means to submit to the moral law. The final consequence of the ascetic ideal is the rise of nihilism, in which life itself appears as a mere *means to death*. Capitalism is this same nihilism in an economic manifestation — Marx writes that capital is "dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."[7] The living is subordinated to the dead. Capitalism is a system of death as much as nihilism is a worldview of death.

Finally, owing to the first two elements, modernity assumes the character of something shadowy and ephemeral. The forces which dominate us, despite their immense power, are never concrete, visible, tangible — we live under the shadow of their abstract domination. Our activity is for the most part instrumental, but the ends which we are made into instruments for never seem to appear, as if we go through our entire lives chasing after a ghost — some mirage of happiness, fulfilment, a shadow of something that would, for once, be valuable in itself. Modernity feels like a permanent transition, but all it ever transitions into is another cycle of its own selfperpetuation. Marx and Nietzsche are important because they explain with exceptional thoroughness how such a social condition is possible.

So many of the developments of modernity can be adequately described as simply *disappointing*. Disappointing, because its real consequences fell short of so many of its most revolutionary hopes. The rapid transformations that were wiping out the old forms of reaction, promising people a clean slate on which to build their world anew, came to reveal new forms of subjugation and exploitation. What meant to finally place humanity at the centre of social life only came to posit a new dominating force. The demands of self-denial, self-flagellation, and renunciation, which life was meant to be freed from, came back revised, secularized and disenchanted, but just as pervasive. It's as if modernity is in essence something stillborn

— its most hopeful promises were broken before they were even fully posited. Nietzsche himself emphatically differentiated between liberalism and the *war for* liberalism. There was something truly liberating about the events that first gave birth to modern institutions, but the spawn ended up obstructing the revolutionary spirit of its mother.

3

Every philosopher who identifies a society-wide condition must themselves be read as a symptom of that condition. Denying this requires the naïve assumption that a thinker can stand outside of society, disinterestedly observing it as if through a God's eye point of view (which is what many Marxist-Leninist parties came to do, acting as the arbiters and keepers of truth, bringing it to the ignorant masses). Nietzsche's thought can only make sense as one of the symptoms of nihilism, and Marx's thought as one of the symptoms of capitalism (and each one should be read through the others' identified condition as well — Marx as symptom of nihilism, Nietzsche as symptom of capitalism). This does not mean that they are passive symptoms, without a force of their own. At their best, they turn against the very entity that made their existence possible.

Nietzsche was aware of how he himself was still often in the grip of the very elements of the nihilism he attacked — moralizing, revenge, resentment, asceticism. One cannot expect him to individually break free from a culturally omnipresent phenomenon, especially when he, the son of a pastor, was originally planning to become a preacher ("the little pastor" was his childhood nickname). Despite his efforts, for instance, he could not overcome resentment towards his sister. After an incident in which she played a part in ruining two of Nietzsche's dearest friendships, he wrote of her in a letter, "she has killed the success of my best self-overcomings: so that, in the end, I became the victim of a ruthless lust for revenge, while precisely my innermost mode of thinking has rejected all revenge and

punishment."[8] The fact that he could admit this shows Nietzsche's special capacity for self-knowledge; he applied his psychological analysis to himself just as to others. This is why he was aware even of the pathological nature of his relation to women. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, right before a socially backwards section on women, Nietzsche writes:

> When it comes to men and women, for instance, a thinker cannot change his views but only reinforce them, only finish discovering what, to his mind, "is established." In time, certain solutions are found to problems that inspire *our* strong beliefs in particular; perhaps they will start to be called "convictions." Later — they come to be seen as only footsteps to self-knowledge, signposts to the problems that we *are*, — or, more accurately, to the great stupidity that we are, to our spiritual *fatum*, to that thing "at the very bottom" that will not learn. — On account of the abundant civility that I have just extended to myself, I will perhaps be more readily allowed to pronounce a few truths about the "*woman an sich*"[*]: assuming that people now know from the outset the extent to which these are only — *my* truths.[9]

There is a clear reason why this remarkable piece of selfexamination comes right before a section on women. Nietzsche grew up in a family of women, came to have an extremely strained relationship with his mother and sister, and failed to have a successful love life. He introduces the passage on women entirely in reference to *himself*, prefacing it with "the abundant civility that [he] extended to [himself]," placing it in the context of a more general point about the stubborn unchangeability of our beliefs, which constitute the "stupidity that we are." In light of this, how could one fail to note the confessional nature of the section? This example shows not only Nietzsche's talent in his style of psychology, but also the incredible twists and turns that his defiance of philosophical convention made possible.

4

On the other hand, a general mistake people make when reading radical thinkers is to equate their thought or their ideals with the object they are criticizing. Thus, Nietzsche is said to be nihilistic, despite being nihilism's

greatest opponent, merely because the *society that he analyzes* is nihilistic. Similarly, Marx is said to be totalizing, merely because the *mode of production that he analyzes* is totalizing. It's as if exposing the unpalatable secrets of society constitutes such a crime, that the very person exposing them is blamed for them, like the romantic partner who is blamed for being too nosy because they discovered their significant other is being unfaithful. Sometimes Marx is accused of reducing everything to the economic; but it is not Marx that does this, it is capitalism! And it is precisely because Marx finds this condition repulsive that he reveals it in all its naked ugliness, to encourage the struggle for its destruction. Many theorists in the second half of the twentieth century and onwards believed that by leaving behind the categories of thought of what they saw as a totalizing and antiquated Marxism, they could unlock new potentials for freedom, creativity, and transformation, but in many cases remained servants of the market all the more unwittingly. To escape the theoretical categories by which something is understood is not necessarily to escape the object those categories are analyzing. A social condition requires theoretical tools adequately devised to confront it.

5

Marx and Nietzsche were neither fortune-tellers nor prophets — they were not right about everything. The two main tendencies they identified in modernity, however, have remained in operation much as they characterized them. Marx predicted that, so long as capital exists, it will accumulate indefinitely, falling into an increasingly smaller number of hands, and correspondingly, an endless growth in productivity will soar side-by-side with an ever-growing wealth inequality. Nietzsche predicted the continued levelling of humanity into a faceless mass, the loss of any sense of greatness, and the corresponding degeneration of culture into the lowest common denominator. They were fundamentally correct about these two

guiding tendencies, not because of any supernatural capacity for clairvoyance, but because they correctly grasped, through their analysis, the motions that they saw unfolding in their own lifetimes. A crucial advantage they had over other thinkers of the time is that they recognized their respective objects of analysis as something historically situated, rather than manifested through eternal laws, and they saw it as *process, in motion*, rather than a static collection of facts to be laid out. Marx historicized the economic categories that classical economists treated as eternal, and Nietzsche historicized the moral/psychological categories that were treated as eternal by moral philosophers and theologians.

It is important to recognize that these tendencies — Marx's economic one and Nietzsche's cultural one — are truly part of a single, total process — the process of modernization. The two tendencies twirl around each other, supporting and reinforcing one another. Any attempt to challenge one without challenging the other will be impotent or short-lived at best. The ties are much too strong to be untangled — the only solution is to cut through both at once.

It would be incredibly easy to minimize the significance of Nietzsche by understanding the connection between these two tendencies as a rigid one-way relationship between "base" and "superstructure." The tendency identified by Marx would be found in the base — the economic and productive relations a given society is built upon. The superstructure, the sphere examined by Nietzsche, would be something merely secondary — the cultural, political, theoretical, aesthetic, and theological factors that arise as the *result* of a given base. The base-superstructure distinction was suggested by Marx in the 1859 preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, but without being understood as a one-way street, nor being presented as an absolute social law. Owing to repeated and careless interpretation, the distinction turned crude and became one of the central

tenets of Marxist-Leninist dogma, Stalin calling it the “essence of historical materialism.”[10]

As this distinction became fixed, rigid, and inflated in a way that Marx never intended, it came to facilitate many crude Marxist analyzes, and gave anti-Marxists a very easy target, with which they were able to portray Marxist social theory as a naive oversimplification. Engels was already having to correct such distortions after Marx’s death:

> Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights. Unfortunately, however, it happens only too often that people think they have fully understood a new theory and can apply it without more ado from the moment they have mastered its main principles, and even those not always correctly. And I cannot exempt many of the more recent “Marxists” from this reproach, for the most amazing rubbish has been produced in this quarter, too.[11]

Marx and Engels were not ignorant of the complexity of social phenomena. In every historical event, Engels writes, there are “innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces”[12]. Yet, at its worst, the base-superstructure distinction became an anti-dialectical principle, leading people to believe that the relationship between the two spheres, already relative as it is, is not one of mutual reciprocity. Some read the distinction as meaning that the superstructure is epiphenomenal, i.e., caused by the base but possessing no causal powers of its own. On this crude reading, which many Marxists still adopt, cultural analyzes such as those of Nietzsche have no revolutionary significance, because they are analyzes only of symptoms that have no causal powers of their own. The obvious problem, however, is that in this reading, Marx’s theoretical works *too* would be a part of the superstructure, and therefore have no significance in affecting the base.

As Marx points out, “theory itself becomes a material force as soon as it has seized the masses.”[13] And while it is true that capitalist economic

relations cause the kind of cultural symptoms analyzed by Nietzsche, one must not forget that those cultural symptoms have causal powers of their own, and themselves contribute to the maintenance of a capitalist base. Overcoming modernity requires not only understanding its economic conditions and how to overthrow them; it also requires power of will, a passion for change, the capacity for value-creation, and, finally, an awareness of oneself as a being whose potential has not yet been realized — no revolution has ever begun, let alone succeeded, without these factors in place, and it is such needs that Nietzschean theory addresses itself to. An 1879 survey of workers' libraries in Leipzig reported that workers borrowed Nietzsche's works considerably more often than they borrowed works by Marx, Lassalle, and Bebel.[14] If nothing else, what this proves is that Nietzsche's works speak to something that is of great concern to the working class. From the German Revolution of 1918-19, to the Russian Revolution, to the French uprisings of May '68, in all of these revolutionary moments, Nietzschean philosophy played a visible role. Bringing this out is by no means a merely scholarly activity.

6

So far I have been addressing the reasons why socialists should turn to Nietzsche. But what does a Nietzschean have to gain from turning to socialism? Whatever ambiguities and contradictions can be found in Nietzsche's thought, most readers can at least acknowledge the truth of the following statements: 1) Nietzsche yearned to transform the world, 2) the transformation he conceived of is contrary to the cold abstractions of both commerce and the state, and 3) the end-result of such a transformation would be a new-found, *human* (or *super*human) control over the Earth ("the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!"[15]).

Capital has fully colonized the globe — there is no spot on the planet immune from capitalist social relations. There are, furthermore, no

mechanisms internal to capitalism that would allow its influence to decrease. This influence is universal and indefinitely increasing, and there is no class and no nation independent of it. So long as one recognizes this, one must also recognize that Nietzsche's dream of transforming the world is impossible if one does not address capital. And, further, given the stage of development at which capitalism operates, the only way to address capital is to *destroy* it. There are no means for moderating capital or limiting it, except those that aim for its destruction.

Capital can be destroyed by neither the state nor by itself. It can only be destroyed by the class which makes it possible but is simultaneously made to *suffer* under its mechanisms — the class that does not grow wealthier on account of its accumulation, a class that is subjugated by capital but is also capable of organizing itself into a subject that wills its abolition: the working class. And because capital is global and universal, it can therefore only be challenged by a working class that is global and universal, as free from nationalisms and petty chauvinisms as capital itself.

If such a challenge were to succeed, it would have to create something affirmatory by way of negating capital, which means negating its basis — private property and wage labour. What would this affirmatory creation be? Nothing if not a society planned on a human basis, in accordance with human needs, interests, desires, and values. Socialized humanity; in short, socialism. So long as a Nietzschean understands and acknowledges the nature of capital, the fundamental choice concerning world-transformation is simple: one either allows capital to operate as it has until it self-destructs in some cataclysmic manner (e.g., succumbing to climate disaster) or one opposes capital with a social force as widespread and powerful as capital itself.

Would Nietzsche agree with this conclusion just so long as he had the benefit of hindsight and had been introduced to an adequate Marxism? Probably not, and that is not my claim, which would in any case be mere

speculation. Nietzsche's work lacks an explicit political program because he identified modern politics itself as nihilistic; because he sought a world which transcended politics. My appeal is not to a hypothetical Nietzsche that became a Marxist, but today's living Nietzscheans, who have perceived, more than Nietzsche could have, the full extent of capital's dominating tendency and its globally destructive force. Our challenge is to inject into Nietzscheanism a political content, by identifying the possibility of a political program geared towards the ultimate *abolition* of politics, a program that turns the products of nihilism against nihilism itself. Today, that is the only way to avoid reducing Nietzschean philosophy to a merely scholarly exercise or a pop-cultural trend; it is the only way to give Nietzschean thought material force — and an oppositional, subversive philosophy without material force might as well not exist.

Would our socialism look like the Soviet Union? No. It wouldn't even be a variation of the Soviet system, nor a reform of it, nor *any* merely quantitative change; it would be a *categorically* different society. If we go by Marx's own analysis of capital, the Soviet Union was a plainly capitalist economy, containing all of capitalism's basic social relations: capital, wage-labour, commodity production. Commodity production means that products are made for the purpose of exchange, and production is therefore carried out for profit, not need. For the process to succeed the profit must exceed the investment — in other words, capital must be accumulated. Capital is accumulated by means of hiring wage workers, who have no choice but to sell their labour-power, and squeezing out as much surplus-value from their labour as possible; which means that the lowering of wages, increasing of work hours, intensification of work is by default systematically incentivized, and the workers are alienated from their activity and its products. It is a system of production the standard of which is the *renting out* of human beings. It is *by definition* capitalism. We must appreciate the radical nature of Marx's analysis, which seeks to define not *this or that*

capitalism, not capitalism at a particular historical stage or given variation, but capitalism *as such*, in its most basic, defining operations, independently of all possible reforms and regulations. Our socialism seeks to eliminate each one of these basic operations, and anything short of this is inadequate; it is my hope that this work will not only suggest the human characteristics of such a socialism, but also inspire the will-to-creation needed to move towards its realization.

7

Modernity, while making explicit to an extent never before seen our situated, finite, and historically determined nature, paradoxically also makes possible a particular kind of universality. For the first time, the globalizing tendencies of capital have produced across the planet a shared social background — capitalist social relations are as inescapable for the waitress as they are for the rural farmer, for the influencer as for the factory worker, for the shareholder as for the beggar. Despite the undeniably different positions that all these people occupy in the network of social relations, they all live in a world where money, commodities, wage labour, and capital have permeated *everything*, ruling as unavoidable facts of life, independently of their individual wills. We all live under the social implications and results of this permeation, according to its means and demands, or we do not live at all.

Does *anything* exist outside of these social conditions? Hardly. Even the cosmos is increasingly colonized by capital, and no one could visit or explore it except by the means provided through those very same social relations. Unless it is the “cosmos” as it exists in our fantasies and imaginations. Perhaps fantasy can be some consolation to the escapist, but one shouldn’t be under any illusion: our fantasies *too* have been colonized by capital — they do not come from the heavens.

Whatever globally shared backgrounds have existed before the advent of modernity, *our* shared social background is unique in the fact that it is human-made (though not to say consciously planned) and can be, even *must* be, transformed by us too. Never before has a situation caused by the actions of human beings had such scope, such shared influence over such a large number of people, or such world-transforming effects and potentialities. It is inevitable: modernity will either destroy humanity or humanity will overcome it on a universal scale. The good news is that the conditions for the possibility of this overcoming are created by modernity itself; while destroying all that was once held sacred, melting all that is solid, capitalism also inadvertently creates the basis for a new universal unity; just as nihilism culminates in the destruction of all values, yet simultaneously makes possible the kind of self-discipline that can be re-directed towards the affirmation of life. Capitalism and nihilism both produce the conditions of their own overcoming.

8

> Bad conscience is a sickness, there is no point in denying it, but a sickness rather like pregnancy.
> — Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*[16]

> The proletariat has no ideals of its own to realize, but to set free elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society is pregnant.
> — Marx, *The Civil War in France*[17]

It is because of the essentially transitionary character of modernity that both Marx and Nietzsche compare it to pregnancy — a painful condition, but one that results in the birth of something new. It is not a coincidence that “labour” is also a word for the process of childbirth — it comes from the Latin word meaning toil, exertion; and it is always the people who toil and exert themselves that give birth to the new. For Nietzsche, all the torture and suffering required to produce guilt, sin, the inner life as a whole, both

sophisticates and hardens people, preparing them for creation, like a bowstring forcibly being drawn back so that its arrow could shoot ever further. Similarly, for Marx, the horrors of primitive accumulation, industrialization, wage labour, create the class capable of ending all classes — the bowstring is pulled back — the tension prepares the arrow to be launched. This is why the Russian Nietzschean Marxist Stanislav Volski wrote that the proletariat is "only the preface to mankind… a transition, a purging fire, the soil for a future harvest."[18]

Modernity can only transition into its own selfperpetuation so long — eventually it must transition into its own destruction; what is in question is what the character of the *creation* accompanying this destruction will be. Will it be active and affirmative? Or reactive and negating? Will it succumb to the destructive powers of modernity in resignation, or will it turn those powers *against* capital and nihilism themselves?

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* "Woman-in-herself" or "woman-as-such." A variation on Kant's metaphysical notion of "thing-in-itself," which refers to an entity as it exists independently of any observer. One should note that Nietzsche is not claiming to speak about "women," but a seemingly metaphysical or abstract notion of "woman-as-such," a play on a Kantian concept which Nietzsche elsewhere disparages as an impossibility.

II: A Nietzschean Socialism

Nietzsche’s Critique of Capitalism

1

Everyone knows that Nietzsche was an anti-socialist, but that by no means entails that he was a supporter of capitalism. In fact, we can find in Nietzsche, however underdeveloped, a *critique* of capitalism. Modern life, as he saw it, was primarily divided between the toilsome and unfulfilling lives of wage workers, the meaninglessly calculated lives of businessmen and property owners, and the inhuman and hypocritical lives of state bureaucrats and politicians. All of these modes of existence for Nietzsche were equally contemptible, and he was unable to discover in any of them the potential for a future society. The reason he was able to take such a critical distance from bourgeois life, why he was able to attack it so incisively despite not being a socialist, was because he was exempt from the defining “types” operating in modernity. Due to his illness, he was able to leave behind the academic life early on, which to him was as dry as the commercial life and as cold as the political. The pension disbursed by his university allowed him to live out the rest of his life while having to engage in neither wage labour nor commerce. This position gave Nietzsche a particular advantage: that solitary distance that he needed for a total critique of modernity; but this was also one of his main *dis*advantages, as a lack of grounding in bourgeois society meant that his means for superseding this society also lacked substantial grounding (this is why it is mostly his earlier works, prior to his self-isolation, that address the productive relations of bourgeois society most explicitly). The reason Nietzsche posited an “aristocracy” as his future ideal was because the aristocracy is a pre-modern

phenomenon, and therefore, like Nietzsche himself, exempt from both labour and commerce. The “aristocracy” was Nietzsche’s way of positing a socio-political element beyond capitalism.

Contrary to the idiotic ravings of Randian Objectivists who identify Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* with the modern capitalist, Nietzsche *despised* capitalism — nothing could be clearer if we look through the textual evidence: “The most industrious age — our own — doesn’t know how to make anything of all its industriousness and money except still more money and still more industriousness.”[1] What is being referred to here if not *capital* — money invested for the sole purpose of returning more money? He describes “the egoism of the money-makers and the military despots, hold[ing] sway over almost everything on earth.”[2] And its result? “The sciences, pursued without any restraint and in a spirit of the blindest *laissez faire*, are shattering and dissolving all firmly held belief; the educated classes and states are being swept along by a hugely contemptible money economy. … The educated classes … themselves grow daily more restless, thoughtless and loveless. … The cultured man has degenerated to the greatest enemy of culture, for he wants lyingly to deny the existence of the universal sickness and thus obstructs the physicians.”[3] A passage that could have easily come from Marx. It is from the perspective of education and culture, his areas of expertise, that Nietzsche could perceive the decadent nature of capitalism most clearly. For what is education reduced to? “[A] speedy education so that one may quickly become a money-earning being, yet at the same time an education sufficiently thorough to enable one to earn a very great deal of money. A man is allowed only as much culture as it is in the interest of general money-making and world commerce he should possess.”[4] Such education produces “either the scholar or the civil servant or the money-maker or the cultural philistine or, finally and more usually, a compound of them all.”[5] All equally contemptible. Modern culture is “commercial culture” — “a society of which commerce is as

much the soul as personal contest was with the ancient Greeks and as war, victory and justice were for the Romans. … This becomes the character of an entire culture, thought through in the minutest and subtlest detail and imprinted in every will and every faculty: it is this of which you men of the coming century will be proud: if the prophets of the commercial class are right to give it into your possession! But I have little faith in these prophets."[6]

Will the capitalists be the agents of change in the revival of culture? Hardly. "How repulsive enjoyment is to us now, that crude, muggy, brown enjoyment as understood by those who enjoy it, our 'educated,' our rich, and our rulers!"[7] Our "rich," after all, are "poorest of all."[8] And the businesspeople are "[d]illigent in business — but indolent in spirit, with [their] inadequacy, and with the cloak of duty hung over this contentment."[9]

But it is not as if work is where the sacred is preserved either. In waged work, "it is simply the law of need operating: one wants to live and has to sell oneself, but one despises those who exploit this need and *buy* the worker." Even submission to tyrants is more bearable than submission to "unknown and uninteresting persons, which is what all the greats of industry are." In wage labour there is no sense of serving something of a higher nature, taking part in something more significant than oneself — "the worker usually sees in the employer only a cunning, bloodsucking dog of a man who speculates on all distress and whose name, figure, manner, and reputation are completely indifferent to him."[10] Fascism was partly an attempt to embellish capitalism by putting a face, or at least a national archetype, on these bloodsucking dogs. In the modern glorification of work, Nietzsche sees only fear of the individual — work functions as "the best policeman" as "it keeps everyone in bounds and can mightily hinder the development of reason, covetousness, desire for independence."[11] It is in *Daybreak* that we find Nietzsche's most sustained address to the workers, those who are "used, and used up, as a part of a machine and as it were a

stopgap to fill a hole in human inventiveness." Although he is sympathetic to their plight, we see here his lack of groundedness, as he suggests mass emigration as a solution. He implores the workers to "declare themselves *as a class* a human impossibility" and to "inaugurate within the European beehive an age of a great swarming-out such as has never been seen before, and through this act of free emigration in the grand manner to protest against the machine, against capital, and against the choice now threatening them of being compelled to become either the slave of the state or the slave of a party of disruption."[12]

2

But if Nietzsche was so unambiguously opposed to capitalism, why was he so averse to considering socialism as a solution? While everyone takes it for granted that Nietzsche was an anti-socialist, no one asks a question seemingly as obvious as it is decisive: What did Nietzsche actually take socialism to be? There are, after all, numerous, mutually incompatible understandings of socialism even among socialists themselves; and there is no evidence that Nietzsche ever read Marx, although he had heard *of* him: in Leopold Jacoby's *Die Idee der Entwicklung*, he had underlined Marx's name.[13] We can only speculate why Marx never earned a mention in Nietzsche's writings, but there is one possible suggestion: Marx avoided the pitfalls that Nietzsche criticized in other socialists. Would Nietzsche have become a socialist if he had read Marx? Once again, that seems implausible, but the point is this: in Nietzsche's attacks on socialism, it is not properly Marxist socialism that was being targeted.

Nietzsche's familiarity with socialism came largely through his acquaintance with Richard Wagner (who was associated with the politics of Proudhon and Bakunin), as well as, above all, his reading of Eugen Dühring. Wagner, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Dühring were *all* notoriously anti-Semitic, which makes it likely that anti-Semitism, which Nietzsche

famously despised, was associated with socialism in his mind (as it sometimes was in his writings). When Nietzsche broke ties with Wagner, he came to despise his anti-Semitism, his nationalism, his capitulation to Christianity, and his association with the German state, but Wagner's earlier revolutionary views were never cited as a reason for conflict. In fact, Nietzsche had preferred the older Wagner — the revolutionary follower of Feuerbach.[*]

In the second half of the 1870s, Nietzsche became a close friend of Malwida von Meysenbug — a German socialist sympathetic to the 1848 revolutions, and another source of familiarity with socialist thought for Nietzsche. The two of them, along with philosopher Paul Rée, stayed in Sorrento, Italy, where they would hold daily discussions and read each other's writings. During this period, Nietzsche, with his views still not entirely developed or decided, and doubtless wanting to appeal to his friend and intellectual companion, wrote one of the only positive remarks about socialism he would ever write: "Socialism rests on the decision to recognize all men as equals and to be just to all of them: it is the highest form of morality."[14] This was before Nietzsche began to view "morality" itself with suspicion, before he identified it as something potentially dangerous and harmful. And in attaining intellectual maturity, Nietzsche renounced both — socialism *and* morality — in one fell swoop. What this points to, however, is what Nietzsche's understanding of socialism was: a fundamentally moral doctrine, defined in terms of equality, rights, and justice. But that is not the socialism of Marx, it is not *our* socialism.

3

If we take a look at the reasons for which Nietzsche attacked socialism, we can demonstrate the way in which Marx's understanding of socialism avoided those reasons, and in the same process achieve an outline of what a *Nietzschean* socialism might look like.

Nietzsche sometimes attacked socialism as being a harmful expression of the *ascetic ideal*; that is, the ideal of *denying the self*. The ascetic ideal arises and gains influence because the weak seek out a meaning for their suffering: to suffer is bearable, to suffer meaninglessly is not. The priests recruit them by giving their suffering meaning: "it is because you are sinful that you suffer, and even *deserve* to suffer." The solution to your suffering, then, is to *punish* yourself: to deny your desires, to suppress your instincts, to *want less*. Nietzsche interprets socialism as a modern, secularized incarnation of this drive: the socialist responds to suffering by rejecting individualism, greed, and the desire for expansion and accumulation. It is functionally equivalent to traditional asceticism, as it responds to weakness by *perpetuating* it.

Nietzsche's equation of socialism with asceticism makes sense if we look back at the early history of socialism, before the rising predominance of Marxism. As Marx and Engels write in *The Communist Manifesto*, the first theories of socialism accompanying the early stages of capitalism were necessarily reactionary: they "inculcated universal asceticism and social levelling in its crudest form."[15] This was due to the infancy of modern industry at the time, and the uncertainty concerning how it would develop. Opposition to the rise of the bourgeois class could only be expressed as the drive to return to the past. The aristocrats still dreamed of turning the wheels of history backwards to a point in time when the bourgeoisie did not yet threaten their power, and the producers in society were mostly serfs rather than wage-workers prone to revolt. They thus found themselves in opposition to both the bourgeoisie and the rising proletariat. Occasionally, their aristocratic criticism of the bourgeoisie exhibited wit and incisiveness, but they lacked the class power to extend it beyond the written page, and their political nostalgia, coupled with their lack of foresight, assured their reactionary character.

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx criticized such reactionary forms of socialism for many of the same reasons that Nietzsche would, referring to them as "crude communism." He describes them as stemming from "[g]eneral envy constituting itself as a power," disguising the "*greed*" which "re-establishes itself and satisfies itself, only in *another* way."[16] Ascetic socialism "negates the *personality* of man in every sphere," driven by "the urge to reduce things to a common level,"[17] it is typified by its "abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilisation, the regression to the *unnatural* simplicity of the *poor* and crude man who has few needs and who has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not yet even reached it."[18] Every single reason for which Marx attacks "crude communism" here — its asceticism, social levelling, disguised envy and greed, loss of personality and of culture — corresponds exactly to the reasons for which Nietzsche attacked socialism, to the point where these criticisms could have come from Nietzsche himself. Marx did not even adhere to a moderate kind of asceticism according to which we should limit our needs. For Marx, the enrichment of the individual entails not only the development of new capacities, but the development of new needs as well. It is in satisfying needs that we gain new powers, and in gaining new powers we also gain new needs.

In the above-cited reference to "crude communism," Marx was referring, at least partly, to religious communistic communities which arose in medieval times — these were characterized by asceticism as well as a hostile attitude to science and works of art. Some of these features then came to be inherited by communist trends in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Concordium community in south-east England, for instance, established just six years before the *1844 Manuscripts* were written, was a small, short-lived example. The prime member, James Pierrepont Greaves, described himself as a "sacred socialist"[19] and aimed towards "*divine progress in humanity*."[20] The members followed an ascetic regime of early

rising, a raw food diet and simple living, renouncing all stimulants and sexual activity. Given such movements, and the generally religious origins of much utopian socialism, it is not at all surprising why Nietzsche would see disguised religious fanaticism and life-denying asceticism hiding behind all of it.

4

Marx not only completely rejected the ascetic aspects of competing socialist movements; one of the very reasons he criticized capitalism for was its peculiar propagation of asceticism. A contemporary example: a few years ago, McDonalds and Visa partnered to devise a monthly budget plan, intended to prove that you can live in the US on minimum wage. Even after assuming ridiculously low costs of living, this plan required one to have a second job (seemingly undermining the entire point of the project) and spend no more than $20 on health insurance, as well as living without heating. The water bill, basic hygiene, food, clothes (don't even think about recreational activities!) received no sections of their own, presumably all falling under the daily allowance of $27, and it is presumed (quite implausibly) that one has no debts. And even with all these frugalities, the plan is possible only on the basis of an eighty-hour work week — two full-time jobs. What we see here is two large corporations demanding from workers a life of *harsh asceticism*, with living conditions that go way beyond the demands of your average religious asceticism, while bringing none of the spiritual comfort.

I am recounting this as an illustration of a point Marx made in 1844: political economy is a *moral* science. It tries to distance itself from all religion and superstitions, presenting itself as neutral and "scientific" in our contemporary sense, objective and valid for all people, making no normative claims beyond what is rationally presupposed. But underneath this façade is an intense moralism — a demand for asceticism. The political

economist, Marx says, represents their scientific creed by “counting the most meagre form of life (existence) as the standard, indeed, as the general standard — general because it is applicable to the mass of men. He turns the worker into an insensible being lacking all needs … To him, therefore, every luxury of the worker seems to be reprehensible, and everything that goes beyond the most abstract need — be it in the realm of passive enjoyment, or a manifestation of activity — seems to him a luxury.”[21] Marx’s words continue to ring painfully true, reminding one of the patronizing articles aimed at millennials, written about the savings that can be made if you refuse yourself your daily cup of coffee, or all those people, lacking both knowledge and empathy, who blame the working youth for their poverty, attributing it to excess money spent on avocado toast, the wrong choice of education, or pure and simple laziness.

Marx’s words speak even more directly of the contemporary economist who, referring to countries like China, speaks of the *gratefulness* that the sweatshop worker feels, or in any case *should* feel, because their country’s average income level has increased. The science of wealth “is therefore simultaneously the science of renunciation, of want, of saving … The science of marvellous industry is simultaneously the science of asceticism, and its true ideal is the ascetic but extortionate miser and the ascetic but productive slave.”[22] Given that today’s ascetic religion — the religion of capital — demands *not* just asceticism but *productive* asceticism, the old religious ascetics today would be criticized as lazy and overly idealistic — who today would be naïve enough to believe that life can be spent seeking matters like spiritual fulfilment?

Thus political economy—despite its worldly and voluptuous appearance—is a true moral science, the most moral of all the sciences. Self-renunciation, the renunciation of life and of all human needs, is its principal thesis. The less you eat, drink and buy books; the less you go to the theatre, the dance hall, the public house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save*—the *greater* becomes your treasure which neither moths nor rust will devour — your *capital*. The less

you *are*, the less you express your own life, the more you *have*, i.e., the greater is your *alienated* life, the greater is the store of your estranged being.

— Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*[23]

One of Marx's tasks was to remove all such ascetic, nihilistic, life-denying traces in the socialist movement. Responding to an unsigned article by Hermann Wagener, Marx attacked the way in which Christianity had been used to transfer "to heaven the task of repairing all infamies" which "justified their continuation on earth." He attacked the preaching of "cowardice, self-abasement, resignation, submission and humility — in short, all the characteristics of the *canaille* –, but the proletariat is not prepared to let itself be treated as *canaille*, and it needs its courage, confidence, pride and independence even more than it needs its daily bread."[24] Take the references to the proletariat out of this passage, and it could easily have come from Nietzsche.

5

A note on religion: It is well known that both Marx and Nietzsche were vocal critics of Christianity, but the actual content of their attacks is commonly misread — they were concerned with the underlying *social basis* of religion and its *practical effects*, and especially *organized* religion as it existed in the Germany of their time, with all of the institutional and ideological power that accompanied it.

Organized religion, it should first be pointed out, arises on a mass scale to satisfy certain needs and perform certain functions — it has a social, practical, and psychological content not reducible to simple sets of beliefs or cognitive propositions. To attack its propositions by means of logical argument, as the New Atheists are prone to do, is therefore useless, as it leaves out much of religion's essential social content, and risks reproducing that content, merely in secular form. Hence why Marx and Nietzsche never

devised logical arguments against theological propositions the way Kant or Hume would. Their goal was to *situate* Christianity socio-historically.

Nietzsche focused on Christianity because of its historical dominance, but he saw in it just one manifestation of a type of life-denial that could be found in many other forms, and was neither essential to religion nor essentially religious, as it could easily take on a secular shape, and indeed did. One must, therefore, target not Christianity, but the life-denial that lurks beneath it, in whatever form it may appear. Nietzsche pointed out that the kind of atheism he saw in his day was only a purer version of what was still in essence Christian, as it reflected the same needs and served the same functions, but without all of its mythological decorations. The secularization of Christian doctrine did not abolish it, but to the contrary, only made it appear even more universal, more ahistorical, purified, open to nihilism. The difference is only in the outward manifestation of the same underlying phenomenon.

And while Nietzsche condemned what Christianity had become, Jesus Christ for him was a free spirit, free from resentment, without enemies, spreading the "glad tidings" that "the true life, the eternal life" exists in "*each of you*: as life of love, as a love without exceptions or rejections, without distance."[25] He saw in Christ a commendable figure, and in Christ's practice the possibility of life-affirmation. What guides us is not some abstract evaluation of religion as a whole, but the requirements of affirmation in our concrete present conditions, and we acknowledge the people who fight alongside us regardless of faith; if we attack organized religion, we do it only insofar as its institutional powers obstruct our lives. Even more importantly, we must be weary of those who are outwardly secular but harbour views as life-denying as any puritan, and seek to brand us as guilty sinners if we do not submit to their commandments.

Marx referring to religion as the "*opium* of the people" is one of the best-known phrases of his entire corpus, but the surrounding context is

rarely read. “*Religious* suffering is at the same time an *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.”[26] In other words, opium as a painkiller, relieving the suffering caused by an alienated existence — in a world where people are denied control over their own lives, the pain of alienation is alleviated by attributing that control to an otherworldly being. If the poor must resort to painkillers to endure their social conditions, it is not the painkiller but the social conditions that require it which must be attacked. And if the ruling classes use religion as a useful piece of propaganda, our ultimate target is not their chosen piece of propaganda (which can be switched according to fashion), but the basis of their class power itself. In either case, to place religion at the centre of our politics would only obscure the root of the problem, and it isn’t a coincidence that many of the leading New Atheists are so comfortable with the status quo. After all, while religious faith has been declining in many countries, the problem of nihilism has only become more entrenched — the root causes are deeper, and this is the reason discussions of religion are mostly absent from this book — the question of religion is not decisive.

6

Liberal discussions of climate change often express a tinge of asceticism when they start by laying the blame on “greed” — “the cult of consumption and greed could wipe out any gains from government action on climate change or a shift to a clean energy economy,” says an article in the *Guardian*.[27] Not only the company owners but even the consumers are attacked for being too greedy, as if that is the underlying problem. It is somehow assumed that greed would not include the desire for an inhabitable planet — as if selfish people do not count avoiding climate catastrophe among their personal interests. Selfishness cannot explain our

incapacity to respond to climate change. Even the most selfish capitalists, even those who are wealthy enough to know that their safety will be prioritized and secured in a catastrophic scenario, they too would prefer a world unthreatened by climate disaster, where things can continue functioning as standard, where they are free to spend their vacation in Italy or Egypt without worrying about rising sea levels. But it is not up to them.

Attacking greed is not just a political non-starter. On the contrary, greed can be a *good* thing. The striking worker's greed for a higher wage, the sick patient's greed for increased hospital funding, the mother's greed for access to healthy food; most importantly, a human being's greed for a more tolerable, more fulfilling existence — all these I judge to be good. Nietzsche writes that "[s]elfishness is worth only as much as the physiological value of the selfish person: it can be worth a lot or it can be worthless and despicable."[28] I know that those who refer to greed to condemn environmental destruction would not condemn the examples of greed I have given above — they would either identify them as a different sort of greed, or not count them as instances of greed at all. But this precisely shows that "greed" does not get down to the root of the issue, and does little to clarify it.

Indeed, blaming the problems of our world on selfishness can often be both tone-deaf and insulting. The average working-class person has to spend most of their waking life working to maximize someone else's profits, and a portion of their wage — itself a miniscule fraction of those profits — must be given away to an unaccountable government which does not represent them. To say to such a person that they are being *too* selfish, that they should spend more time denying themselves and living for others, is a bad joke. On the contrary, we must say, be *more* selfish! Demand more! Better yet, take more! You will find that your "selfishness" has many friends, that most people share your personal interest in finding a better and fuller life, and that it is precisely in collective unity that you will find the

means to satiate it. Nietzsche characterizes the good kind of selfishness as a selfishness that *overflows*, that enriches its surroundings in the very process of pursuing its interests. “Insatiably your soul strives for treasures and gems, because your virtue is insatiable in wanting to bestow” — “Indeed, such a bestowing love must become a robber of all values, but hale and holy I call this selfishness.”[29]

Some working-class people have rightly rejected the moralizing injunction to be less selfinterested, only to then be tricked into denying themselves once again and even coming to justify this denial. This happens under the direction of various right-libertarians and Objectivists who argue that a concern with one’s own interests is only appropriate to capitalism, a system in which the majority must work for the enrichment of an unaccountable minority. How does someone like Ayn Rand manage to pull off this trick? By disguising under her heroic “egoism” yet another abstract moral code — it is by *following* an abstract moral code that you best serve your egoism, so she argues. This requires Rand to sometimes qualify it as “enlightened selfinterest,” seemingly using “enlightened” to mean “complacent.” Nietzsche identifies a general formula at the centre of all religions and moralities: “do this, don’t do that — and then you’ll be happy! Otherwise…”[30] The same old formula is given to us again and again, this time even in the name of egoism. (Rand’s moral philosophy is at its basis Kantian, and yet, perhaps trying to distract people from the true nature of her “egoism,” she had the nerve to attack and condemn Kant as being the ultimate enemy of self-interest.) Nietzsche is often cited as an influence on Rand, but a more careful reading of his works would have exposed to her the absurdity of the idea that every individual’s self-interest can be equally facilitated and pursued under the same set of abstract morals. It would be quite a mesmerizing coincidence if each person’s self-interest across time and space could be served equally well by one single set of commands, and even more mesmerizing that this set of commands just so happens to be in

the tradition of a certain vein of duty-based, more particularly liberal, more particularly Kantian morality, refracted through twentieth-century *laissez-faire* capitalism. And even if following this morality leaves you to be the one permanently deprived and exploited, it is only because your self-interest demands it! Even here, Nietzsche's analysis of the ascetic ideal and the self-flagellation inherent to it holds up so well — it is for your own good that you are suffering!

7

Owing to many of the historical movements and regimes that have adopted the label of socialism, as well as the characterizations popularized by anti-socialists, many people have come to associate socialism with the sentimentalist ideals of selflessness, pity, and altruism. Socialism is commonly understood as the extension of charity, the ideal of denying oneself so as to benevolently give away to the less fortunate. Certain anti-socialists, particularly right-libertarians (those proponents of small-government, *laissez-faire* capitalism who appropriated the historically socialist term "libertarian" for themselves), assume this identification of socialism with charity, and attack it as inefficient and coercive on the grounds that human nature is simply not altruistic, while simultaneously arguing that private charities are enough to tackle the problem of extreme poverty. Meanwhile, certain leftleaning liberals and self-identified socialists themselves will adopt the standpoint of charity and altruism, and moralize about the selfishness and greed of our society.

Nietzsche, without a doubt, attacked all such political manifestations. But so did Marx. If we are talking about socialism as Marx understood it, as human emancipation, the abolition of classes, the overcoming of alienation, the unleashed self-development of the human being, then talk of replacing greed by altruism becomes completely irrelevant, if not meaningless. As Marx and Engels make clear, "communists do not oppose egoism to

selflessness or selflessness to egoism, nor do they express this contradiction theoretically either in its sentimental or in its highflown ideological form; they rather demonstrate its material source …; they are very well aware that egoism, just as much as selflessness, is in definite circumstances a necessary form of the self-assertion of individuals." Most importantly, the "communists do not preach *morality* at all"![31]

Let us consider charity, not in the broad sense of "kindness" which would be found in any human society, but charity as an *institution*: it did not pre-exist class society and it will not persist after it, as it presupposes the division of people into the charity-givers and the permanently deprived — deprived not just of particular goods and resources, but of autonomy. The wealth inequality characterizing our world has consistently risen, as Marx had predicted — in the US, it has surpassed the wealth gap of the French revolution, and even reached a record high unmatched since the time of the Pharaohs. Such circumstances bring out something absurd about the nature of charity: the wealthier you are, the more you can donate to charity without noticing even a dent in your wealth. In other words, if you successfully profit from exploitation and deprivation, then giving away a meagre fraction of those profits to victims of exploitation and deprivation will be upheld as a shining example of morality and virtue, even as your wealth is made possible by the continued existence of such victims. While the wealthy donor is praised (and praised all the more if the donation was arranged to be publicized) the receivers are expected to show submissive gratitude, hopefully leading to the added benefit of a feel-good spectacle. Nietzsche was all-too-aware of the common psychological side-effects of relations based on pity — the resentment and shame it tends to fuel.

Of course, if the only problem with charity was the hypocritical self-satisfaction and arrogance it encourages on the part of the donor, or the forced gratitude it demands of the receiver, this would be a small price to pay for effectively reducing the suffering of the unfortunate. But the false

sentiments involved are only a symptom of something much deeper: *dehumanization*. When Oscar Wilde wrote about socialism, he approached it from the standpoint of the suffering individual, who yearns to escape the concrete circumstances of a degrading life, the "sordid necessity of living for others." It is for this reason that in writing *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, he brought up the inadequacy of charity as a solution to poverty: "[The poor] are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so. Charity they feel to be a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution, or a sentimental dole, usually accompanied by some impertinent attempt on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannize over their private lives."[32]

The exploitation and deprivation suffered by people due to capitalist social relations are inherently dehumanizing. The loss of autonomy that such dehumanization entails is what makes it necessary to resort to the benevolence of strangers, which often engenders resentment on the part of the receiver. When no resistance against dehumanizing conditions can be found, and it permeates to the depths of one's soul, the outcome is likely to be resignation to one's own lack of agency, the sensation of being at the mercy of external forces. In such an instance, charity — the necessity of relying on arbitrary benevolence — is likely to only reify that dehumanization, as one experiences one's life sustained by an individual looking down on one from above, in interactions where one's right to decision-making has been denied.

The problem is not just that the benevolence on which the beggar relies in charity is entirely arbitrary, making life an experience of domination interspersed with arbitrary moments of relief; the much greater problem is that the charity drives one into helpless dependence on the donor, whose already superior status is elevated even more, owing to the control they exert over the helpless — your subservience to them becomes even a moral duty, owing to the gratitude you are expected to feel. Private charity

foundations, even when they are funded with public money, largely lack transparency and accountability, and the advantages they are conferred mean they have an interest in perpetuating themselves rather than solving the issues they claim to tackle. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the largest private foundation in the world, donates billions of dollars to projects around the world, ranging from healthcare and education to agriculture and clean water. Like any investment, this gives the foundation immense influence over the handling of these projects, and yet their organization is not subject to any democratic procedures and lacks any guarantees of accountability, especially not to the millions of poor people whose lives are actually affected by the decisions it makes. In most charities, the recipients do not even have the privilege of being consulted about their needs or preferred ways of satisfying them, leading to cases of charity that do not bring relief at all, such as a school nutrition program in Armenia which distributed powdered milk to schools that had no running water, which was needed to turn the powder into milk; or a program in Zambia that failed to build urban infrastructure because its organizers expected already overworked women to do demanding physical labour for food rations.[33]

In short, charity treats its recipients as passive victims. But the basis of socialism, it sadly needs to be pointed out, is not passive victimhood. Nor is pity. Pity may be the basis of charity, or state welfare politics, but *our* socialism is rooted in the will to self-affirmation and the exertion and expansion of one's powers. In relations of institutional pity, socialist action begins not with the donation, but with the withering away of the submissive gratitude of the victim, who comes to realize that alongside their arbitrary subjugation grows a great potential for power.

To defend myself against *uncharitable* readings, and at the risk of stating the obvious, I must point out that the above is not a condemnation of the recipients of charity, much less an attempt to blame them; nor is it a

moral attack on any particular individual(s) in general. It is rather a condemnation of the *state of things* responsible for their subjugation in the first place, and a rejection of "solutions" that do not address that subjugation. Neither am I arguing that the appropriate alternative to charity is to stoically endure one's own subjugation and suffering, which would in no way address the passivity and dehumanization at root. What I *am* arguing is that, in *all* conditions of subjugation and dehumanization, weapons of resistance must be sought out in the very circumstances one seeks to resist.

All the great proletarian revolutions, from the Paris Commune to those in Germany and Russia, immediately began using abandoned and vacant buildings to house the homeless. This was not a case of charity. The homeless were treated as participants in the revolution and had the chance to be active in the decision-making processes on a common basis. The immediate goal was not almsgiving but a matter of facilitating the autonomy of the subjugated, building the common basis for that autonomy, in relationships of reciprocal solidarity. Bringing in the language of altruism or selflessness clarifies nothing here. Among the revolutionaries engaged in seizing houses, as well as the homeless that occupied them, there was no need for self-denial — they were acting according to their personal interests, because they had a common interest in the success of the revolution, and to that end, they supported one another of their own accord, as friends and family members do.

Empowering alternatives to charity are not limited to nationwide revolutions. In 1971, seventy homeless families in Milan occupied empty homes, and with the support of local factory workers, resisted two violent eviction attempts by police, until the local government was forced to provide them and 140 other families with housing. In the US during the Great Depression (and let us remember that today's unemployment levels are at their highest *since* the Great Depression), thousands of unemployed

people organized on a radical basis. Various instances of mass organizing carried out by the unemployed themselves, varying in size and spontaneity, ranged from demonstrations and marches, to seizing food from companies, to storming relief stations, to forming unemployed workers' councils and committees. Some communists even organized gas squads and electric squads to return heating and electricity to families facing eviction. Such organizing efforts culminated in the formation of a national organization for unemployed workers, Workers' Alliance of America, whose constitution, up to 1937, called for the "abolition of the profit system." Its convention in 1936 drew 900 elected delegates from unemployed workers' organizations across thirty-six states, and by the end of the year had reached 600,000 members.[34]

In these cases, one finds a socialist society being prefigured in various ways — in its rejection of exchange value and capitalist property relations, in its privileging of human needs, in its mutually-affirming unity and solidarity, in the free exertion of social powers as they shed their alienation. When examining these examples of extreme poverty being addressed on a radical basis, how distant from one's thoughts is any notion of pity! Notions of self-denial and almsgiving are completely absent. The difference from charity should be violently clear, and does not the latter example bring to mind Nietzsche's values and ideals? Charity is slavish and reactive, it constrains the recipient to react passively to external stimuli; the pity involved tries to address the problem by reifying it, leading to the festering of resentment and shame. But the same issue addressed on a radical basis leads to the active discharge of one's instincts, to the overcoming of obstacles and the growth of power, to self-affirmation and joy in struggle. Contrary to charity, which tends to turn its recipients into a faceless mass defined only by their suffering, the individuals in the midst of self-organizing *feel* and *live as individuals*, and *affirm* themselves as individuals.

If there is one man that Nietzsche had in mind more than any other when speaking of socialists, it was Eugen Dühring — an anti-Marxist anti-Semite.[35] When we acknowledge Nietzsche's view of Dühring as the representative of socialism, the particular form of his aversion to socialism begins to make a lot more sense. Nietzsche, for instance, more often than criticizing socialism as ascetic, criticized it as fundamentally *driven by resentment*, which he also associated with slave morality in general. It was because of Dühring that Nietzsche came to this conclusion, as Dühring had explicitly *praised* resentment as being integral to the human sense of justice. It was Dühring that tarnished the name of socialism by characterizing it as reactive revenge.

Quite suitably then, this is how Dühring is presented in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*: "I again remind readers who have ears to hear of that apostle of revenge from Berlin, Eugen Dühring, who makes the most indecent and disgusting use of moral claptrap of anyone in Germany today: Dühring, today's biggest loudmouth of morality, even amongst his kind, the anti-Semites."[36] It's a shame that, to our knowledge, Nietzsche never read Engels' critique of Dühring, informally known as *Anti-Dühring*, as he would surely have been delighted in seeing Dühring's "moral clap-trap" mocked with such playful severity. Dühring, Engels writes, "the prophet who has now arisen, has in his bag, all ready-made, final and ultimate truth, eternal morality and eternal justice. This has all happened so many hundreds and thousands of times that we can only feel astonished that there should still be people credulous enough to believe this, not of others, oh no! but of themselves. … As with all prophets, instead of critical and scientific examination and judgement one encounters moral condemnation out of hand."[37]

But even forms of socialism that avoided the language of asceticism, selflessness, sentimentalism, and moralizing often ended up not being nearly *transformative* enough, merely seeking to reform what was in its very essence rotten, and this problem is perhaps even more widespread among socialists today. Consider, for instance, those who understand socialism as consisting in mere wage-reform, whether equality of wages or an increase in wages — as common in Nietzsche's time as it is in ours. One can hardly blame Nietzsche for attacking socialism given such understandings of it. The system of wage labour is repulsive *by and of itself*, not because of its specific circumstances — Marx and Nietzsche both recognized this. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche makes an important point regarding workers that many socialists would do well in taking in: the workers are "used, and used up, as a part of a machine and as it were a stopgap to fill a hole in human inventiveness! To the devil with the belief that higher payment could lift from them the essence of their miserable condition — I mean their impersonal enslavement!"[38] To rent out your body, to be bossed around, to be constantly constrained in your capacities and choices, to have no say in the process and organization of production that you make possible — "impersonal enslavement" is a perfectly suitable name for this, and none of it is addressed by a mere increase in wages, no more than slavery is addressed when the slave is given more food and a more comfortable bed to sleep in. Marx points out the absurdity of such reformist socialism: it attacks the capitalist mode of distribution (allocation of wages) rather than the mode of *production* underlying that distribution (private ownership of the means of production). It is the very fact of being forced to sell your labour-power for a wage that entails the entire capitalist system and all of its problems.

Then there were, often in tandem with wage-reform, statist conceptions of socialism, such as that of Ferdinand Lassalle, who believed that socialism consisted in state control of industry. But any kind of statism was in complete opposition to Nietzsche. In the twentieth century, everyone from social democrats to Stalinists to fascists came to make a horrific equation: the equation of the social with the national, and the national with the state. It was this equation that made it possible for the fascists to call themselves "national socialists." But Nietzsche would have none of this. As Zarathustra said, "State is the name of the coldest of all cold monsters. It even lies coldly, and this lie crawls out of its mouth: 'I, the state, am the people.' / This is a lie! The ones who created the peoples were the creators, they hung a faith and a love over them, and thus they served life. / The ones who set traps for the many and call them 'state' are annihilators, they hang a hundred cravings over them."[39]

What many people do not realize is that Marx opposes statism just as fervently. In *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, referring to the German Workers' Party, Marx attacks "the Lassallean sect's servile belief in the state."[40] As early as 1843, he wrote that "[i]n true democracy the *political state disappears*"[41], because the state for him was *in essence* alienating — it requires the separation of people from their social powers, powers which the state absorbs for itself.

Opposition to the state was one of the main ways in which Marx and Nietzsche rejected the politics of Hegel. What allowed fascists to make use of Hegel was his emphasis on the state, the imperative to serve and glorify it. That Hegel had this emphasis was to be expected, considering that at the time German universities were funded by kings and princes, and one could not become chair of philosophy without vocally favouring the state. Hegel viewed the state as a self-contained organism, as the highest development and expression of Spirit; and the purpose of each individual was to find their appropriate position in relation to it. For obvious reasons, fascists

found this view appealing, and it allowed them to portray the nation-state as a perfectly harmonious whole, which was failing only due to an invading parasite. Nothing could be further from the thought of Marx and Nietzsche.

But did Marx not believe that a workers' state must be established in the course of a revolution, which can be abolished only after a period of development? Yes, but not in the way that Marxists-Leninists would have you believe. Marx's "dictatorship of the proletariat" is often taken to mean a centralized, all-powerful bureaucratic state, which exists as a stable system of relations until the time comes for it to magically wither away. We can determine the falseness of this characterization if we look at Marx's description of the Paris Commune, which he considered to be the first historical example of the dictatorship of the proletariat:

> This was … a Revolution not against this or that, legitimate, constitutional, republican or Imperialist form of State Power. It was a Revolution against the State itself, of this supernaturalist abortion of society, a resumption by the people for the people of its own social life. It was not a revolution to transfer it from one fraction of the ruling class to another, but a Revolution to break down this horrid machinery of class domination itself …
>
> — Marx, *The Civil War in France*[42]

The dictatorship of the proletariat consists in "self-working and self-governing communes, the standing army replaced by popular militias, the army of state parasites removed … the state functions reduced to a few functions for general national purposes."[43] It consists, therefore, in the continuous *reduction* of state power. Engels wrote that it is part of the communist program to establish "[c]omplete self-government in the provinces, districts and communes through officials elected by universal suffrage" and to abolish "all local and provincial authorities appointed by the state."[44] The workers' state as Marx conceives it is radically different from all previously existing states, because it is in effect an *anti*-state. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not a stable set of relations which persist until they can wither away, as the Marxist-Leninists conceive it. Rather, it is

a *process*, and this process consists in the constant *destruction* of state power. The workers' state is defined by its own self-destruction.*

* Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) — German philosopher, one of the Young Hegelians. His materialism was one of Marx's biggest philosophical influences.

* For Marx's opposition to the state, and his characterization of the dictatorship of the proletariat, see his draft of *The Civil War in France*. See also the paper "Revolution Against the State" by Derek Sayer and Philip Corrigan.

Egalitarianism

In response to my Nietzschean defence of Marx and socialism, many are likely to point to Nietzsche's famous aversion to egalitarianism, assuming it generates a conflict. Many still claim that Marx understood the goal of communism in terms of equality, or even that, making a distinction between "equality of opportunity" and "equality of outcome," Marx desired absolute equality of outcome. This is painfully tedious, and not just because equality of outcome and equality of opportunity presuppose one another and cannot be separated in the manner presumed — differences in wealth, for instance, which are usually classified as inequalities of outcome, simultaneously have a great effect on differences in opportunities. Regardless, Marx never spoke of equality (nor any other moral standard) as an ideal. One of the only instances in which Marx brings up egalitarianism is in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, where he denounces it as a useless bourgeois concept, along with the notion of a fair wage. Responding to the German Workers' party's proposed program, he strongly objected to their phrasing when they demanded "the elimination of all social and political inequality." It wouldn't necessarily be correct to say that Marx *opposed* equality — he did not find it to be a coherent political demand in the first place, and so long as we speak in such terms, we will never grasp Marx's true radicalism. What would the demand for equality consist of? Equality between classes? Marx wanted to *abolish* classes, and equality cannot be the attribute of what does not exist. Economic equality? Marx wanted to transcend the very category of the economy! What would the economy refer to in a world where capital no longer existed as an entity independent of particular humans and their activities? To state the obvious, production and distribution would still be

organized, but not on the basis of exchange, and hence not along economic lines. The same holds for political equality. What would grant people political equality in a society where the state does not exist? What Marx sought was not greater equality between alienated categories, but the abolition of those very categories.

In one of the only works in which Marx brings up the issue of equality, he writes:

> Right, by its very nature, can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable only by an equal standard insofar as they are brought under an equal point of view, are taken from one definite side only … everything else being ignored.
>
> — Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*[1]

One can speak of equality in various respects — equality of strength, equality of income, equality of social influence — but to posit equality *tout court*, *absolute* equality, can only be either absurd or meaningless. Thus, while socialism would certainly rectify inequalities *in certain respects*, this would depend on the case at hand and involve such a number of factors that the privileging of "equality" as a political ideal would offer us no guidance. After all, an increase in equality in one respect is always accompanied by a *decrease* in equality in another. If, given two workers with differing rates of productivity, you make their hourly wages equal, you will necessarily make the compensation they receive *per product un*equal, and vice versa. Notice that even the famous principle of "from each according to ability, to each according to needs," which Marx uses to characterize the higher phase of communism, unlike the liberal dogma of individual rights, has no basis, in its manner of formulation, in a notion of equality. Quite to the contrary, its very starting point is the presupposition that people have *different* abilities and *different* needs — in other words, that people are *individuals*.

Hence, not only does Marx never posit any political ideal in terms of equality, he does not even imply it or presuppose it, and the very reason

egalitarianism is rarely even mentioned in Marx's works is because of how little he thought of it as a political demand. Engels confirms this in a letter to August Bebel, where he calls the "elimination of all social and political inequality" a "most dubious expression":

> As between one country, one province and even one place and another, living conditions will evince a *certain* inequality which may be reduced to a minimum but never wholly eliminated. The living conditions of Alpine dwellers will always be different from those of the plainsmen. The concept of a socialist society as a realm of equality is a one-sided French concept deriving from the old "liberty, equality, fraternity," a concept which was justified in that, in its own time and place, it signified a phase of development, but which, like all the one-sided ideas of earlier socialist schools, ought now to be superseded, since they produce nothing but mental confusion, and more accurate ways of presenting the matter have been discovered.[2]

And it certainly still produces "mental confusion," even being particularly well-suited to that purpose. Because the concept of equality can only make sense when speaking of equality in *some respect*, discussions concerning equality *as such* disguise the respect with which equality is being addressed, with the common result that the two parties in a discussion will be speaking of equality *in different respects*, and thereby completely talking past each other. Without a doubt, this is often taken advantage of quite deliberately.

Tekla Miller, a former prison warden, provided a ridiculous but illuminating example of the pitfalls of egalitarian discourse in her memoir *The Warden Wore Pink*. As the title suggests, Miller understood herself to be a feminist social activist as much as a prison warden, and in this capacity she fought for equality between male and female prisons. One of the campaigns she was involved in concerned the unequal allocation of weapons between the prisons, as Miller lamented that the guards in women's prisons have access to a smaller number of items such as shotguns, rifles, gas canisters, and riot equipment. She further complained that in escape attempts, male prisoners are more likely to be fired at than women are, and in her campaigns for equality, she fought for the equal right

of prisoners of all genders to be shot. Angela Davis, who I owe this example to,[3] points out that such liberal, formalistic notions of equality were used to make the conditions in women's prisons more repressive. People are likely to object to this example, owing to how obviously ridiculous it is. It *is* ridiculous (even if some prison wardens would disagree) but it is precisely a great problem that one does not have the conceptual resources to explain *why* it is ridiculous from a purely egalitarian standpoint.

People are different — they possess varying features, properties, capabilities, they interact with varying relations in varying circumstances. Therefore, the standard liberal conceptualization of equality, still common today, argues that equality, in the relevant sense, exists independently of particular circumstances and qualities. This response in liberal theory has its origins in the Christian tradition, which sees each individual as possessing a soul, equal before God. What makes people equal, then, is something independent of particular circumstances. This resolves the contradiction, but makes it politically useless, because politics *always* unfold through particular circumstances and conditions in time and space; they cannot be informed by something standing outside those circumstances and conditions, except in completely trivial ways.

The only way to turn equality into an absolute ideal is through some violently un-materialist metaphysical construction (such as a Christian soul, or some essentialist conception of human nature) — one which, as Amadeo Bordiga puts it, "considers each individual to be a perfect 'unit' within a system made up of many potentially equivalent units, and instead of appraising the value of the individual's opinion in the light of his manifold conditions of existence, that is, his relations with others, it postulates this value *a priori* with the hypothesis of the 'sovereignty' of the individual."[4] Such a view emerged through a synthesis of Christianity (all individuals possessing a fundamentally equal soul that is independent of all particular

properties and empirical circumstances) and capitalist ideology (all individuals being equal in their capacity as rights-holders, contract-signers, transactional agents). This type of egalitarianism is therefore contrary not just to Nietzsche but also to Marx and the Marxist tradition, as it can only rest on the denial of the fact that "the consciousness of men is a concrete reflection of the facts and material conditions of their existence."[5] If Nietzsche can be labelled an antiegalitarian, so can Marx.

Rights

But is not socialism, at the very least, about the equality of *rights*? To answer this question, we must first ask what rights *are*. Nietzsche defines them in *Daybreak* as “that part of my power which others have not merely conceded me, but which they wish me to preserve.”[1]

In Nietzsche’s account, there are two ways for these “others” to arrive at such rights:

1. Through their “prudence and fear and caution.” The other class either expects something from us in return, considers a struggle with us to be useless or dangerous, or see in the weakening of our powers a disadvantage — for example, against a common enemy.
2. By “donation and cession.” A class has a surplus of power and is capable of disposing of some of it by giving it to us. In doing so they “presuppose a feeble sense of power” on our part. Granting us rights becomes a way for them to express their superiority.

Rights, in other words, are essentially “recognized and guaranteed degrees of power.” “If power-relationships undergo any material alteration, certain rights disappear and new ones are created.” This can happen in two ways:

1. If our power is materially diminished, the granters of our rights change their attitude towards us, and usually deny us the “rights” we previously had.
2. If our power is materially increased, the granters of our rights try to suppress our rights, preventing their increase, and justify it in the

name of “duty” — duty towards the rights already established.

This is an incredibly useful account, because it is explicitly materialist, grounded in the struggle between groups, and therefore perfectly compatible with Marx’s approach. As evidence of its validity, one only has to consider labour rights. When, during the Great Depression, workers in the US began organizing and greatly increased their material powers, the ruling class suddenly established new workers’ rights through their “prudence and fear and caution,” as Nietzsche put it. They feared the class struggle turning into revolution, and granted the workers additional rights to appease them — hence the New Deal. However, workers’ power was greatly diminished during the Reagan years, with precisely the result that the Nietzschean-Marxist conception of rights would predict: “If our power is materially diminished, the feeling of those who have hitherto guaranteed our rights changes: they consider whether they can restore us to the full possession we formerly enjoyed — if they feel unable to do so, they henceforth deny our ‘rights’.” This same point is proven in countless examples throughout the entire history of class society — even the most basic of “human rights” had to be fought for, and were gained only through material increases in power, as is clearly shown by anti-slavery struggles and the civil rights movement.

The Nietzschean view of rights is more appropriate to a revolutionary movement than many of those produced by self-proclaimed socialists. Not only does it allow us to situate those rights said to be “eternal,” “natural,” and “inalienable” in their historical context, it allows us to see how they are shaped and re-shaped by the powers we exercise.

What conclusion does this lead to regarding “equal rights”? Rights are concessions granted to us by a group that wields power over us; because they presuppose the power to *enforce* (through the police force or the military) they can only be meaningfully granted by a materially dominating

group to a subordinate one. The granting of rights necessarily presupposes that our power is alienated from us, and the entire framework of rights would therefore be superseded in a classless society. After all, who would grant us our rights in a society where we were no longer confronted and dominated by an external institution with power over us? So long as classes still exist, on the other hand, rights *by definition* cannot be equal, as their enforcement fundamentally depends on a power imbalance between competing groups.

This is one of many examples of just how far Marx moves away from liberal categories of political thought. *Our* socialism entails a society in which our social powers are no longer alienated, no longer withheld from us by a state — what would it even mean to be granted equal rights in such a society?

Some may be reasonably suspicious of such a critique of rights, given how many struggles had to be waged and how much blood had to be spilt to establish and secure the rights which are today immensely valued by vulnerable people. I do not claim that the advances made through certain rights' movements and the concessions that they won are unimportant. Struggles for workers' rights, women's rights, the civil rights movement, LGBT rights — these made not only significant improvements to many people's lives, but involved struggles through which various disenfranchised groups organized and thus empowered themselves. That is undeniable. However, the reason that such rights are required in the first place is evidence of a fundamentally alienated society, a society based on a gulf between the rulers and the ruled, consisting of citizens whose social powers are removed from their immediate control. Various rights-based movements make this society more tolerable, but as long as this alienation exists, the rights established will always be precarious. Overcoming the entire framework of rights will be necessary to build a society in which human self-empowerment is not a contingency, but the *basis* of social life.

Individualism

1

One of the most un-insightful, oversimplifying, and boring ways in which Marx and Nietzsche are contrasted is by labelling the former a collectivist and the latter an individualist. Such binary divisions always conceal the most important and interesting details, reducing thinkers to placeholders in a preconceived schema. For Marx, communism was nothing if not the “free development and movement of individuals,”[1] while Nietzsche’s Dionysian ideal, which he held onto throughout his entire career, was a state in which one transcends the limited individual perspective. The very idea that one could simply choose between one or the other, individualism or collectivism, was birthed by modernity, and its crudeness is entirely contrary to a thinker like Marx or Nietzsche, both of whom understood that the two categories exist in a mutual dialectical relationship.

2

> It is clear that the real intellectual wealth of the individual depends entirely on the wealth of his real connections. Only [communist revolution] will liberate the separate individuals from the various national and local barriers, bring them into practical connection with the production (including intellectual production) of the whole world and make it possible for them to acquire the capacity to enjoy this all-sided production of the whole earth (the creations of man). *All-round* dependence, this primary natural form of the world-historical co-operation of individuals, will be transformed by this communist revolution into the control and conscious mastery of these powers, which, born of the action of men on one another, have till now overawed and ruled men as powers completely alien to them.
>
> — Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*[2]

What has been made of the ideal of “individualism” is an example of the cunning ingenuity with which capitalism tries to justify itself. The reason individualism has come to be such a prized value in the first place is precisely because of how much we are denied it, starved of it, how actively thwarted it is — it is because people are denied the pleasure of being individuals that individuality has become such an important concern for people, such a strong selling point when advertising products and such a strong standpoint from which to condemn socialism. What is ingenuous is that the ideologues of capital will use this very ideal that capitalism actively makes unattainable as a means of *justifying* capitalism!

When people speak of the desire to be an individual, what do they mean? Clearly, we are not speaking of a neutral term here, nor something assured by default — we are speaking of individuality as an ideal, as something that can be realized to a greater or lesser extent, that can be acquired or lost, maintained or prevented. The term is vague enough that its meaning will vary in emphases, shades, and details from person to person (an ambiguity often utilized to great effect), but there are some shared generalities that can plausibly be suggested. When a person wants to be an individual, they want to feel in-control, autonomous, capable of making decisions in matters that affect their own lives; they want to feel like the parts of their personhood unique to them are significant and treated as such, and they want the ability to express these with dignity; finally, they want to be able to *develop* themselves in all the ways that distinguish them, to engage in endeavours that they value, to pursue activities they hold dear, and to expand all the talents, skills, powers, and capacities they consider to be essential to the person that they are.

It is safe to assume that at least one of these factors would be deemed important in the common person’s ideal of what it means to be an individual, and for the vast majority of humans, capitalism thwarts *all* of them. Most people spend the majority of their adult lives following the

orders of managers and bosses, typically to the point of having less control over their working life than a medieval serf did, with no say in what they wear, when they eat, or even the manner in which they stand, let alone decisions concerning organization, production, and distribution. Of course, few people are promised autonomy or control in the workplace, and even fewer are naïve enough to expect it. The political sphere, on the other hand, adds mockery to the mix, parading as the peoples' one true chance to make a difference, an opportunity to engage in decision-making, even to participate in the running of the nation! For the most part, all this comes down to is a miniscule influence over which masters shall represent one's country for the next few years, picked from an almost non-existent range of options, barely distinguishable wherever differences can be found at all, and having little accountability except to those who sponsor them with capital.

And what about the uniqueness of one's personhood? To be treated as a person is an ambitious enough demand on its own. Most workplaces reduce people to numbers in a profit-calculation, viewing them as sources of labour power more than individuals, and disposing of them whenever convenient and legal. As a consumer, too, a person's significance is typically reduced to the provision of money in exchange for products and services, and in pursuit of this exchange, advertisers will reduce them to consumption patterns, statistical units, and stand-ins for demographics. The expression of one's personhood often remains something limited to a small sphere of social interactions with friends and family, a sphere which itself, since the beginning of capitalism, has been subject to the often dehumanizing, sometimes destructive demands of money and property — and even *this* sphere is steadily being commodified or picked apart, so much so that many people look back to the certainties of twentieth-century middle-class family life with painful nostalgia, as a Garden of Eden, while growing social isolation among young people is turning even friendship into a luxury.

Capitalism, more than any previous system of social relations on Earth, is thoroughly *im*personal, by no means in the sense that it is irrelevant to people's personal lives, but in the sense that it operates independently of all personal wishes and wants, regardless of all personal attempts to plan and gain control, pushing these aside as mere externalities in its relentless drive towards capital accumulation. To say that capitalism is uniquely impersonal is not, first and foremost, a moral judgement, nor does it entail that capitalism is the "worst" or most exploitative social system in history; rather, it is a claim about the objectively marginal status of the individual, *any* individual, under capitalist society. In slave societies, the master subjugated the slave; in feudal societies, the lord subjugated the serf; in each case, the working person was exploited for the sake of the personal wishes and desires of the ruling individuals. Under capitalism, it is no longer a person who subjugates the worker, but the social relation of capital itself which subjugates humanity. In a slave society, the master expressed their individuality at the expense of the individuality of the slave. In capitalism, capital enacts its laws at the expense of individuality *as such*. It is in *this* sense that it is uniquely impersonal. We cannot straightforwardly condemn this social condition as being "worse" than all previous social systems, because it possesses a double-sided potential: on the one hand, this impersonality threatens the very existence of human autonomy, and even risks leading us down into complete self-destruction; on the other hand, this same impersonality showcases, in alienated form, the unprecedented acceleration and expansion of human powers; it presents us, therefore, with the first class society whose overcoming cannot consist in the establishment of a new class society, but must end in the total *affirmation* of human autonomy.

As the preceding points already suggest, development through rewarding activity, the pursuit of fulfilment in one's daily endeavours, is not easy to come by either. Most lives are spent in workplaces that operate by

actively barring all possibilities of personal development and fulfilment, whereas the very purpose of advertising is to repeatedly promise fulfilment to potential customers, which must be renewed again and again without ever being satisfied. For most, daily life is so exhausting that even free time is often spent merely recuperating in preparation for the next day, when it's not spent engaging in escapism, not infrequently through harmful and self-destructive methods. For yet others, engaging in rewarding activities is too costly, or the free time allotted insufficient. And this is not to speak of the innumerable people on Earth whose living circumstances are so wretched, whether lacking shelter, food, or a basic sense of security, that even the concept of free time has melted into an undistinguished stream of mere survival.

Practical activity, even if it is done primarily to satisfy a need, can often be empowering and enriching, but wage labour operates precisely by removing this possibility — by separating the fulfilment of needs from empowerment. The tedious, dominating, and constraining nature of labour under capitalism makes it so that a person can spend a decade at a given workplace and still feel no more developed or richer in their individuality from it.

> Presupposing private property, my individuality is so far externalised that I hate my activity: it is a torment to me and only the appearance of an activity and thus also merely a forced activity that is laid upon me through an external, arbitrary need — not an inner and necessary one.
>
> — Marx, *Notes on James Mill*[3]

> [The worker] does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself.
>
> — Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*[4]

It should be obvious that the social relations constituting the world market have little to do with fostering individualism, and that the social structures found in each particular country, however wealthy, deny the privilege of a

proud individuality to the majority of its inhabitants. Wherever increases in the freedom of individuals were won, they were won through sweat and blood, most often that of the working class, who had to spill blood not just for the betterment of their daily working conditions, but for the expansion of political participation and free speech, for the rights and dignities of disenfranchised minorities, for healthcare and education, as well as against the tyranny of the state; against its violence, suppression, and surveillance, against unlawful arrests and mass incarceration, and against the condemnation to fight a despicable war against your will, to murder people who you have more in common with than you do with your own rulers. Each one of these victories were small steps towards the realization of individual freedom — each one constituted the acquirement of new options and new horizons towards which individual self-realization could be pushed; or at least acts of resistance against the state encroachments on the possibilities already existing. Such victories were so violently resisted and suppressed precisely because they threatened state and capital — the ultimate enemies of the individual. But if it is true that capitalism opposes the development of any substantial kind of individuality, how is it that it successfully hijacked the language of individualism for its own ends? It did so by first taking up the social atomization created by capitalism (which, in truth, is itself one of the main obstacles to real individuality) and turned it into the prime ideal of what individualism is: the absence of interference on one's life as an isolated social atom; a purely negative conception of freedom and individualism.

Given how thoroughly permeated our world is with social atomization, most people would not even think to question a view of individualism as the lack of interference on an atomized individual. If one takes atomized individuals as the starting point of all human societies, as liberal theory does, it is perfectly intuitive to then think that a person's individuality is secured by default, so long as no interference is present, especially

interference from “the collective” — the mob or the tyrannical state that threatens to swallow the individual in conformity. However, because of the pervasiveness of liberal theory, there is a seemingly obvious suggestion that rarely crosses people’s minds: What if the individual is not by nature opposed to, or contrary to, the collective? What if, to the contrary, the realization of human individuality *requires* the opportunities and advantages provided to it by collective life, collective participation? The suggestion that capitalist ideology could never consider is that there are forms of social organization in which individuals benefit and complement each other, *not* as social atoms that got together only to fulfil their isolated, private interests, but as members of a community, who realize themselves as unique individuals precisely *in community* with others. Certain pre-capitalist societies intuitively understood this possibility — the possibility of a mutually beneficial harmony between the individual and the collective, such as the communal village which the individual saw themselves as a *part* of, rather than an atom external to it.

To remove the individual from community, from collective decision-making, from society, does *not* increase their individual freedom, like right-wing “libertarians” would have you believe. Instead, it *blocks* most paths to the development of one’s individuality and freedom, turns the majority of people into *obstacles* that only get in your way; it denies you the exertion of your capabilities, talents, and interests, which overwhelmingly involve and depend on firm social associations with other people. Capitalist alienation often reduces the individual to someone miserable, insecure, cowering, mistrustful, or enraged, as the majority of society, even in one’s immediate surroundings, appears as alien, as hostile, or at best indifferent, and an inseparable gulf lies between you and it. Precisely *this* condition makes so many people feel that freedom is found in separation and isolation, in the rejection of community, in the negation of society, but they thereby only resign themselves to their alienation.

In the popular imagination of modernity, social atomization has become an eternal fact of life, a presumption that requires no second thought; it is seen as the default, natural state of things which is violated whenever an individual suffers an interference into one's rightful private sphere. As the now clichéd story of the social contract goes, there was once upon a time a natural condition in which all individuals lived in isolation, as non-social creatures. However, owing to the benefits that a government or political community would provide, the individuals decided to come together and give up the advantages of solitary life for the sake of a more secure, law-governed one under the authority of government. They seal the deal, like all pre-social beings do, by signing a contract. Marx and Nietzsche both realized the absurdity of this story; it presumes it to be a basic fact that individuals could develop independently of and externally to the process of socialization, as if one's interests and needs are not *by nature* social.

> First peoples were creators and only later individuals; indeed, the individual himself is still the youngest creation.
>
> — Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*[5]

> [F]or only as a social animal did man learn to become conscious of himself …
>
> — Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*[6]

While social atomization is often taken to be society's default state, broken up only by particular instances of interference, it was in fact this atomization itself that arose only through "interference" — through the exertion of violent force. Capitalism itself was only made possible by historical developments such as the enclosure movement in England, during which communally owned land was bought up, privatized, and fenced in. The villagers were forcibly relocated, the communal land seized, their firmly established communal ties broken and replaced by ties of exchange. The separation of the individual from the collective was a violent and bloody development. The "collective" then assumed the impersonal and

artificial character of the state, experienced by most as something alien. Thus, the individual and the collective were both destroyed through the same process.

Capital restrains the individual at every step — it casts its shadow over each and every person and answers to no one. It pits people against each other in competition, forcing them to fight over resources in a zero-sum game, so that the mass of people, rather than complementing one's individuality, are constantly experienced as potential impediments to it. In our social interactions, capital makes us interact primarily *not* as individuals, but as the replaceable representatives of thoroughly impersonal entities — property, classes, labour power, commodities, brands. In the desperate search for an identity, many resort to nationalism, which they mistakenly see as representing their home, childhood memories, closest acquaintances, and their heritage, only to drown deeper into a faceless mass, which disguises its impersonal nature with a national flag.

3

Does socialism devalue the individual, so that the collective may be strengthened? No, socialism has no need of doing that, because that devaluation has already been thoroughly accomplished by capitalism. Individuals under capitalism are reduced to slaves of capital. Yes, even the propertied are such slaves. Capitalism is not a society where the suffering and the toiling of the many allows powerful individuals to posit their values and to shine forth as ideals — where an Aristotle rises on the backs of slaves. Who could possibly look at an Elon Musk or a Mark Zuckerberg and see in them the manifestation of the *Übermensch*? One may be a worker, sacrificing one's body and efforts to produce wealth, or one could be an owner, sacrificing one's ideals and principles to manage successfully, but, in either case, what manifests itself is the denial of life, absolute inhumanity,

total subservience to capital: “The possessing class and the proletarian class represent one and the same human self-alienation.”[7]

Some people fear socialism as an anti-individual system, because they believe it deprives people of what is *theirs*. But they forget that capitalism has already deprived the vast majority of the global population of their property, that those lucky enough to have shelter are most likely to be renting it from some unaccountable landlord, or that most people spend the majority of their lives working in a building that is not theirs, with tools that are not theirs, enriching a company that is not theirs, in exchange for a meagre crumb of the wealth that they helped produce, which will likely never be enough to afford property.

> Supposing that we had produced in a human manner … [m]y work would be a free expression of my life, and therefore a free enjoyment of my life. In work the peculiarity of my individuality would have been affirmed since it is my individual life. Work would thus be genuine, active property.
>
> — Marx, *Notes on James Mill*[8]

For us, socialism is nothing if not experienced as empowering from the standpoint of the living individual. Indeed, it is created and developed by individuals, who create the conditions of their own self-affirmation. A socialist world, in which the means of production were managed *socially*, would be one in which the individual has a say in the process of production, organization, and distribution, and can affirm and empower themselves through this process. Only then can the individual have freedom, not just in the negative, life-denying sense, but positive, *real* freedom. And it is only then that one can *become what one is*, as the Nietzschean motto goes. Only when virtues can no longer be bought or rented, when they can no longer be commodified, marketed, or advertised, only then can one’s virtues reflect what one is. People doubt that such a world is possible, but its possibility is proven in revolutionary moments such as the establishment of the Paris Commune, which allowed each individual the possibility of political participation, or the spontaneous emergence of revolutionary workers’

councils around the globe throughout the twentieth century, which took the means of decision-making back from the claws of capital, and placed offices and factories under human control. In such moments, the individual feels themselves affirmed and empowered, not against a collective but *in and through* a collective, and our goal is the creation of a world in which such moments are the standard.

III: Morality and *Aufhebung*

1

The attack on morality is one of many commonalities between Marx and Nietzsche. But what does attacking morality actually entail? We must determine what the word means in this context. Sometimes, the word “morality” is used in an incredibly broad sense, where it is equated with anything normative, i.e., any kind of evaluation in terms of “good” or “bad,” “better” or “worse,” or any kind of statement about what “ought” to be done. It is obvious that, taken in this broad sense, there is no way of living without morality. Using this definition, Marx could be said to be a moralist simply by virtue of denouncing alienation, or exploitation, or desiring human emancipation. In fact, Nietzsche would say that in this broad sense, *all* life is normative, all experience is a *valuation*. There is, however, a narrower, but nevertheless prominent understanding of “morality,” which in philosophical discourse is sometimes distinguished from “ethics.” It tends to claim for itself one or more of the following characteristics: 1) that it is universal, equally applicable to all, 2) that its obligations are unconditional, 3) that it is ahistorical, valid for all times and places, 4) that we have moral responsibility to follow it, and should feel guilt or remorse if we don’t, and 5) that in accordance to it, our actions can be judged as “good” or “evil” in absolute terms. It is *this* understanding of morality in Western philosophy, largely derived from the Christian tradition, that Marx and Nietzsche have no patience for. It includes many Christian forms of morality, Kantian morality, utilitarianism, as well as many common-sense views about what is “right.” We can call this particular understanding of the term “Morality,” with a capital-M.

2

Nietzsche attacks Morality from several aspects, with varying methods. He attacks, first of all, the logical validity of its premises. Take, for instance, all the forms of morality that depend on the view that people possess unconditioned free will — that one is always free to choose the course of action one will take. Furthermore, it is held that an action can only be judged in moral terms so long as a person exhibits an unconditioned, undetermined free will in choosing it. This requires a logical absurdity: an uncaused cause. Because, as soon as we admit that the person's action had a cause, and that cause in turn itself had a cause, and so on to infinity, we have to then admit that the action could not have been completely free, completely undetermined — at least to some extent, it was an effect following from previous causes.

Indeed, in some cases, this view leads into complete self-contradiction. Nietzsche makes this argument in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*: moral responsibility presupposes free will, a will that is undetermined — not constrained by prior causes. However, the ascription of moral responsibility is also said to require determining the *reason* for which the act was carried out. And yet, a reason would be a cause — a will that was determined by a reason, a prior cause, could not have been undetermined or uncaused. Therefore, ascriptions of *both* free will and moral reasoning, which many common-sense notions of morality presuppose, are *mutually incompatible*.

3

This kind of cognitive attack, however, on its own is relatively weak. Morality, after all, is not primarily followed for cognitive reasons. Most people rarely consult the literature on moral philosophy before deciding whether something is right or wrong, and professional philosophers will always find some way to wriggle out of a logical problem posed by a moral

belief that they have already decided is correct. The second method Nietzsche utilizes, therefore, especially in the *Genealogy of Morality*, is the *historical method*.

Nietzsche believes that *all* social phenomena have a history — none of them can be understood in timeless, universal, and absolute terms. No form of morality would have any effectiveness if it wasn't defended by various institutions and social norms, and so none of its forms can be understood outside of the interests that led to their propagation. And whenever Morality is held to be eternal, to portray it as a historical development instead is already a form of attack. Engels, for instance, argues that "all moral theories have been hitherto the product, in the last analysis, of the economic conditions of society obtaining at the time. And as society has hitherto moved in class antagonisms, morality has always been class morality."[1] When a Morality claims to be eternal, historicizing it in this way is already a way of putting it into question, rousing suspicion against it. But there is a further form of attack that this makes possible: the revelation of ulterior motives. Whereas all kinds of moralists will try to make themselves look good by arguing that their actions are entirely driven by moral considerations, historicizing can reveal the interests at play. It is not difficult to see, for instance, how the moral commandment not to steal defends the interests of certain classes above others. It is very useful for the bourgeoisie if the starving person who steals food from a supermarket is judged to be evil; meanwhile, the same moral law does not apply to the supermarket's owners, as they exploit their employees' labour power, waste food, or raise prices to make it less accessible.

Nietzsche's particular kind of historicizing exposes, behind various cases of moralizing, motives that are not only ulterior, but hypocritical. To understand this, we must go into Nietzsche's account of the rise of what he calls slave morality, in the first essay of *The Genealogy*. Nietzsche's category of "slaves" refers to people who are deprived in various ways, and

lack any means of dealing with this deprivation materially. If they lack access to food, they thus proclaim that gluttony is a sin. Because they are incapable of taking revenge against their enemies, they proclaim wrath and vengeance to be a sin. Because they lack wealth, they proclaim greed to be a sin. If they are unable to get laid, they proclaim lust to be a sin. In this way, they attempt to thrive in their own impotence by proclaiming that the very things they lack are in fact not desirable at all, and thus turn their weaknesses into virtues. Slave morality, in other words, arises as an extreme version of the fable of the fox and the grapes: the fox, being unable to reach the grapes hanging on the tree, proclaims that it doesn't want them anyway, as they're too sour. It is an extreme form of this fable, because the slaves do not just proclaim a particular set of "grapes" to be undesirable — they proclaim that to desire grapes *as such* is sinful! It is not the slaves' deprivation, but their manner of response to this deprivation that generates slave morality, and the entirety of the capital-M Morality dominant today has its origins in this slavish response.

The origins of Morality are not only vain and duplicitous. They are also driven by *revenge*, which the moralists in the same breath judge to be sinful. Because the slaves are incapable of gaining power in real life, in a material and substantial manner, they exert their drive-to-revenge in an imaginary way. Not only do they present themselves as virtuous because of their weaknesses and lacks, they then present their enemies — those who *do* possess what they lack — to be *sinful*, and therefore *destined for hell*. A worldview is invented according to which the slaves are made out to be the winners.

As an example of this drive-to-revenge being expressed in morality, Nietzsche cites St. Aquinas, who says that one of the joys of being in heaven will be the possibility of watching the sinners burn in hell from above. Is this an expression of a selfless, impartial form of virtue? This is not an exceptional example either. Consider all the preachers who teach to

“love the sinner” while simultaneously taking great joy in telling LGBT people that they will burn in hell. This is how Nietzsche reveals the pathology hidden beneath the preacher’s moralizing. Indeed, it tends to turn out that the most preachy, most moralizing, most puritanical people are also those most driven by hypocritical hatred and resentful revenge.

4

One of *The Genealogy*’s broad lessons, proven correct time and time again, is that Morality often functions as a means of revenge driven by impotence, a roundabout way of exerting one’s will-to-power. Aggressive moralizing is always generated by a lack of real power in combination with growing resentment, which in the end only aggravates the feeling of impotence. When dissatisfaction is accompanied by a feeling of helplessness, and direct outlets cannot be found, where can one turn, if not to some realm outside history?

We can find many examples of this in the history of socialism. One clear early case is the so-called Crisis of Marxism of the 1890s. The crisis arose because socialists believed that the European Great Depression of 1873-96 would be capitalism’s death throes, and when global capitalist expansion was unexpectedly restored, pessimism followed. The most life-negating response was exemplified by German social democrat leader Eduard Bernstein: he decided that what Marxism was lacking was abstract morals, and began grounding his socialism in Kantian ethics. This was accompanied by the rejection of dialectical thought, and even of revolution itself, in favour of parliamentary reform — vocal liberalism on every front. In a phrase, it can be summed up with Bernstein’s fittingly banal platitude: “Dedication to the Common Good! This is the eternal foundation of morality.”[2] It is important to remember that, at the turn of the century, “social democrat” was not yet interchangeable with “reformist.” The transformation of social democracy into spineless reformism, and the worst

theoretical developments accompanying it, was thus pioneered by Bernstein and his followers, as a reaction to a wave of political pessimism. The resulting “ethical socialism,” as it is sometimes called, came to its logical conclusion when neoliberal Tony Blair came to identify with the label.[3]

The 1970s had experienced a sudden but short-lived revival in working-class struggle and political creativity, but soon declined to give way to neoliberalism, and history repeated itself as certain socialists went through that same pessimism, followed by that same moralism and that same reformism. Echoing Bernstein’s insistence that Marx had to be supplemented with (the anti-revolutionary liberal) Kant, academic criticisms of capitalism became increasingly moralistic and abstract, often given in the name of justice; except this time the move away from Marx was not even disguised. So-called “Analytical Marxists” came to prominence in this process, inheriting Bernstein’s reformist “ethical socialism.” While Bernstein and his followers played their part in politics by fully integrating themselves into capitalism, the Analytical Marxists didn’t have much of a political influence of any kind at all. First as tragedy, then as farce.

But resignation, complacency, and accommodation are not necessary, even when faced with great defeat, momentary pessimism, and feelings of impotence. We can understand this through what Nietzsche says in *Ecce Homo* in terms of illness and decadence. Decadence, as Nietzsche defines it, refers to the manner in which one *responds* to one’s illness: one is decadent if one tackles the illness by aggravating it. This is how the reformists tackle capitalism, believing they have found a remedy to their political pessimism when they were in fact aggravating the illness, through moralism of the soul and complacency of the body. The decadent is at best capable only of accommodating the illness, rather than fighting it. The opposite type — representatives of an *ascending* life — respond to illness by *transforming* it into “an energetic *stimulus* to life,” by using the failures

and mistakes experienced to make themselves even *more* powerful, such as when the body's immune system improves after defeating an illness; the non-decadent socialist prepares to be even *more* powerful once the next opportunity for revolution arises.

What would be an example of such a non-decadent response in the realm of socialism? After the failed German Revolution of 1917-19, Marxist theorist Alfred Sohn-Rethel argued that the new wave of Western Marxism (with figures such as Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer) "evolved as the theoretical and ideological superstructure of the revolution that never happened. In it re-echo the thunder of the gun battle for the Marstall in Berlin at Christmas 1918, and the shooting of the Spartacus rising in the following winter."[4] Perhaps every great revolution, despite failure, produces something like its own superstructure. We could then theorize the difference between the ascending and the decadent responses of socialists to failure thus: the ascending socialist develops the theory which arose within that ghostly revolutionary superstructure despite its failure, while the *decadent* socialist becomes friendlier with the pre-existing bourgeois superstructure instead. The former grasps towards that unrealized health in anticipation of its revival, the latter submits to the sickness, allowing oneself to be defined by it.

5

Nietzsche attacks Morality also as a method of *control*. When people believe themselves to be sinners, especially in combination with the fear of hell, they will happily give power over to those who successfully present themselves as saviours and moral reformers. Nietzsche attacks the notion of "free will" as being "the shadiest trick theologians have up their sleeves of making humanity 'responsible' in their sense of the term, which is to say *dependent on them*."[5] As an example of this, one only has to think of how

the medieval Christian church used to sell “tickets” that secured one’s place in heaven.

But it is not the church that today profits most by Moralizing, and it would be misguided to focus on it. The most profitable form of moralizing is that which judges all revolt, protest, mass action to be evil. Last year, protesters in the US were constantly morally condemned for attacking property as a form of revolt, after years upon years of peaceful protesting had had no effect. Meanwhile, the same Moralists exempted murderous cops from all such blame. The moralists have no problems with the state violence that happens every single day — when innocent people are murdered by cops, incarcerated, denied access to basic necessities, or even when hospitals and civilians are bombed abroad. As soon as people get fed up and take up mass action to challenge this constant violence, the life-deniers suddenly begin weeping, giving out sermons about how only peaceful protest is legitimate. The duplicitous nature of Morality is clearly shown when the ideal of “pacifism” is upheld to justify the continuation of systemic violence. Even Martin Luther King Jr., who the life-deniers always bring up for this purpose, was constantly decried as violent and dangerous in his time.

The propagation of guilt is not only weaponized by reactionaries, it plagues the socialist left internally. When a leftist is driven by the urge to identify who is wrong, guilty, problematic, and tackles this question independently of the practical movement towards human emancipation, we are in the murkiest depths of moralism. To attribute blame for the sake of it, to punish independently of concerns for consequences, that is nothing but cruelty for the sake of it.

6

Marx and Nietzsche always philosophize in a worldly manner — they *ground* philosophical discussions in earthly struggles. They approach

morality the same way. Nietzsche reveals it as something that developed on Earth, throughout history, and in connection with definite interests, rather than something handed down from above, or something inherent to our nature. He reveals not only the history behind it, but the psychology that drives it: he uncovers all of its shameful aspects, all the characteristics of it that people try to hide. Where the moralists try to discover eternal ideals, Nietzsche sees only the "human, all-too-human."

But there is one final and incredibly powerful attack that Nietzsche carries out against Morality: namely, that it sabotages the joy of life. It turns people into sinners, fills them with guilt, makes them hate themselves. Not only is it cruel, it is counter-productive, and it affects in the worst way precisely those people who are already most plagued by feelings of worthlessness. Rather than encouraging people to change themselves and the world they live in, it very often leads to self-flagellation for its own sake, followed by selfloathing resignation. This reaches its ultimate conclusion when *life itself* is condemned as not living up to Moral standards — hatred of the self expands into hatred of the world. This is what is meant by the ascetic ideal: a morality that addresses people's problems only by aggravating them, that teaches people to blame themselves, that encourages them to want less and seek less, to renounce and resign.

In opposition to this, Nietzsche proclaims the "innocence of becoming." Life as such is fundamentally innocent. It is only particular human beings that give it the character of something guilty: "we immoralists in particular are trying as hard as we can to rid the world of the concepts of guilt and punishment and cleanse psychology, history, nature, and social institutions and sanctions of these concepts, the most radical opponents we face are the theologians who use the concept of the 'moral world order' to keep infecting the innocence of becoming with 'punishment' and 'guilt'."[6] To free life from guilt and sin, and thereby make it joyful — Nietzsche calls this "*the great liberation*."[7]

7

But, some may object, is not socialism precisely an example of the kind of moralizing I am attacking? Does it not attempt to portray the capitalists as morally responsible and guilty? There are, to be sure, moralizing forms of socialism, but that is not *our* form of socialism, not the one Marx upheld. Marx clearly shows, after all, that the capitalists are only doing what is reasonable, given their interests and the economic position that they occupy in society. The point of a socialist revolution is not to *punish* anyone, but to transform social relations in such a way that it is no longer in anyone's *interests* to exploit, to incarcerate, to wage war; to make punishment superfluous. Its end-goal is nothing if not the affirmation of life, the realization of a *human* existence. Radicalism is in fact *diametrically opposed* to moralism: moralism means identifying individual guilt and disbursing punishment; radicalism means grasping the *root* of the issue, and the root of the issue is never individual guilt, but *social relations*. Marx affirms the innocence of becoming when he proclaims that "[w]hen our turn comes, we shall not make excuses for the terror."[8] This is because revolution isn't about identifying the guilty and carrying out punishment against them, taking on the role of God and deciding who deserves what, wrapping it in the language of moral justification — "excuses." A revolution must only negate insofar as that negation is *necessary* for affirmation — in a revolution, if something is destroyed, it is not on account of its guilt and sinfulness, on account of what it "deserves," but rather, on account of what is necessary for the transformation of life. If a revolution succeeds in this, it doesn't *need* excuses; all moralizing becomes superfluous, because the actions speak for themselves, and require no disguises.

8

Law and right, according to Derrida, are derived from vengeance — a system of equivalences in which punishment is carried out *in exchange* for moral transgressions. Such a system of equivalences is, for Nietzsche, the origin of guilt. Because punishers *enjoy* their ability to cause pain to their offenders (one of the reasons agents of the state utilize it so much), pain can be used as payback in exchange for an offense committed. In other words, Moral violation incurs a debt, and the suffering and deprivation of the transgressor repays it. When the currency is not physical pain, but internal, mental pain, this manifests itself as guilt, an involuntary self-punishment. Guilt, weaponized by the legal system, is able to cause pain to the offender without exercising punishment directly, i.e., physically, thereby making punishment much more efficient. Given the sadistic origins of "the justice system," guilt and resentment permeate the entirety of the Western legal tradition, in which the desire for vengeance becomes formalized into a legal code (at its most primitive, the legal code of the justice system is about identifying the equivalences between a certain violation and a certain level of pain or deprivation that must be paid for it). The code allows those in power to judge, avenge, hurt, and punish. No matter who is "in charge" of such a system, at its base is the denial of the innocence of becoming.

Hence the section titled "On the Pale Criminal" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This section speaks of the relation between a judge and a "pale criminal." Both are fundamentally steeped in the tradition as outlined above — both are criticized as being driven by revenge and vengeance — both *despise*. Even so, Nietzsche commends the criminal more than the judge. "Your killing, you judges, should be pity and not revenge. And insofar as you kill, see to it that you yourselves justify life!"[9] The problem with this demand to justify life is that the judge *as judge* is *incapable* of affirming life, because the entire judicial tradition, being based on the distribution of guilt and punishment, depends on the *denial* of the innocence of becoming. The entire section attacks the moralizing nature of this profession —

“‘Enemy’ you should say, but not ‘villain’; ‘sick man’ you should say, but not ‘scoundrel’; ‘fool’ you should say, but not ‘sinner’.”[10]

Nietzsche identifies the “criminal” as a social construct — the person labelled a criminal is a victim of an “image” — “An image made this pale human pale.” In other words, it is not the act itself that is of a criminal nature, but the image given to it by the judicial system. This nihilistic-judicial tradition then takes this image of crime and expands it, transforms it into the transgressor’s very essence — the human judged is no longer just a human who committed a criminal act, but a *criminal* — someone *defined* by one’s *criminality*: “I call this madness: the exception reversed itself to the essence.”[11]

Nietzsche prefers the criminal, the one who is at the very least brave enough to transgress: “There is much about your good people that makes me disgusted … I wish they had a madness from which they would perish, like this pale criminal!” But the judges, incapable of “madness,” that is, of transgression, “have their virtue in order to live long and in pitiful contentment.”[12]

The ability of the pale criminal to transgress is honourable, but the problem is that this transgression is not yet affirmative. To understand this better, let us concretize it: as an example, the pale criminal could be identified as the individualist anarchist terrorist. Such a terrorist is commendable for being capable of a “madness,” transgression rather than resignation to the status quo, and even their ability to despise is more commendable than those who are incapable of anything but moderate contentment — the “ass” incapable of selectiveness, who says yes to everything. In this sense, the criminal’s worth is above that of the judge, but despising, important as it is as a steppingstone, must too be overcome. The pale criminal is the type that Sartre calls a “rebel,” contrasting it with the “revolutionary.” The Rebel desires the preservation of the very system one rebels against, so that the rebellion could go on indefinitely; thus, the

Rebel's "madness" is a purely negating one, and requires the continued reproduction of that which is being negated, so that the negation could persist.

To cease being "pale," the terrorist would have to affirm one's transgression, but cannot, because that would require overcoming the entire nihilistic-judicial tradition against which the terrorist wants to continue indefinitely rebelling, the very system which christens the terrorist as both "pale" and a "criminal" in the first place. Affirmation, in other words, requires a form of organization beyond individual terrorism, which is capable not only of negating, but of affirming something beyond the system being negated — it must involve a rejection of the resentment inherent to modernity.

An act of individual terror often arises from the attribution of responsibility to some individual deemed guilty; it can only, in the end, be an act of punishment, both individualizing and moralizing — following, once again, some system of equivalences. When, for instance, the eco-terrorist attacks the CEO of an environmentally destructive corporation, what is attacked is not the set of social relations that makes such environmental destruction possible, nor does the attack bring us closer to the end of environmental pollution, and thus to the affirmation of the Earth. Instead, all that the attack accomplishes is to individualize the pollution, so that it is identified with a single person, and then moralize it, so that the person is understood as polluting on account of their evil nature, and as such being worthy of punishment. As long as an individual act of terror remains just that, it cannot be affirmative, because it denies the "innocence of becoming," and sees among its enemies sinners deserving of pain. In other words, it shares a foundation with the state's justice system, being only an unofficial, informal version of it. The criminal is "pale" insofar as they themselves adopt the role of an illegitimate judge.

Once Nietzsche has shown that the legal system reflects something historically contingent, rather than any eternal Law, and once he has further identified the label of “criminal” as something artificially constructed out of an unwarranted reversal, all that is left is to destroy it. This is also where the revolutionary class is capable of an honesty that the ruling class, mired in hypocrisy, could never possess. To expose this hypocrisy in its glaring absurdity, let us take a detour into historical detail. The Paris Commune, a short-lived government established in 1871 by revolutionary workers in Paris, gave all its citizens the ability to actively participate in politics — for the first time, workers were able to play a part in the political life of society, to deliberate and discuss, to elect and recall, to take on political positions without thereby becoming “politicians.” The ruling classes, at the mere sight of working-class political participation, trembled with horror, and paused the Franco-Prussian War just to focus on obliterating their *real enemy*. Marx, speaking of the horrifying massacre that the national French army, under orders of the bourgeoisie, carried out against the revolutionary workers for daring to organize themselves, empower themselves, and affirm themselves, wrote: “The civilization and justice of the bourgeois order comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters. Then this civilization and justice stand forth as undisguised savagery and lawless revenge.”[13] In times like these, one doesn’t even need recourse to a symptomatic theory of the hidden sadism and instinct of revenge lying underneath Morality — it emerges right at the surface.

When the French national army received its orders to crush the Commune, blood flowed indiscriminately — the troops murdered men and women, the elderly and children, the armed and the unarmed. Though estimations vary, at least 10,000, possibly up to 30,000, Paris citizens were massacred, thrown into mass graves in parks and squares. Out of the 38,000 workers arrested, victims were chosen arbitrarily to be shot (a custom that,

even then, had for a long time been prohibited in war). No fugitives were permitted. Awaiting their trials, the prisoners were held in extremely crowded and unsanitary conditions — out of those found guilty (the vast majority), some were sentenced to death, some to forced labour, some to deportation, some to solitary confinement, the luckiest ones sent to prison. For what? For daring to show that the working class is capable of governing itself.

After the massacre, the French government launched an investigation into the causes of the uprising. Without a hint of irony, their conclusion: the insurrection was caused by a lack of belief in God. It was not the soldiers of the National Guard who were deemed Godless, as they murdered children and their parents and grandparents, as they rounded up defenceless prisoners and fugitives and played lottery with their lives. No, the revolutionaries who made it possible for workers to participate in politics, who did not even seek to extend their rule beyond Paris — *they* were the Godless ones. If that's not insulting enough, the victory of the French state against the Paris revolution was proclaimed by President Adolphe Thiers as "[t]he victory of order, justice, and civilization." Without intending to, the French ruling classes unintentionally taught us some unpalatable truths about existing society: our God sides with those who murder children, and our order, justice, and civilization rest on mass graves.

Marx said that to find a similar instance of cruelty one has to go all the way "back to the times of Sulla and the two Triumvirates of Rome. The same wholesale slaughter in cold blood; the same disregard, in massacre, of age and sex, the same system of torturing prisoners."[14] But the history of working-class struggle didn't end there, and unfortunately, after Marx's death, numerous such massacres came to pass once more. Such a bloodbath repeated itself in the early twentieth century in Germany, this time at the hands of a social democratic government. The social democrats in parliament, who absurdly saw themselves as acting on behalf of socialism,

for fear of losing their parliamentary power, were sooner willing to side with proto-fascists rather than the revolutionary workers. The proto-fascist paramilitary group *Freikorps*, under direct orders and approval of the social democratic government, murdered hundreds of striking workers (this, in addition to the fact that the social democrats told the German people to vote for Paul von Hindenburg, who would end up signing the act giving Hitler's regime arbitrary powers, should make it obvious that Nazi power did not grow on unprepared soil — it arose on brutal state suppression of workers' resistance). During an uprising in the town of Ruhr, at least 1,000 workers were massacred. The well-known revolutionary leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who just a few years prior had been in the social democratic party and left because they could not bring themselves to support the First World War, were tortured and executed by the *Freikorps*. When the revolution started dying out, and the revolutionary workers sent delegates to negotiate with the government, the delegates were taken away and shot. This time, it was not on behalf of God that merciless blood-spill was justified. The party in power was supposedly acting on behalf of the workers' movement. As they collaborated with both reactionary elites and proto-fascists, the social democrats had the nerve to blame the radical socialists for the failure of the Weimar Republic. It should come as no surprise at this point that it was precisely the *reformist* social democrats, those responsible for the crushing of the revolution, who tended to claim that socialist politics must be supplemented with an abstract theory of Morality.

There is no limit to the cruelty that the ruling class will resort to in order to protect its interests, no law which could restrain its rage and thirst for blood, no moral principles sacred enough to be left unbroken if they stand in the way of the state and capital. It is precisely because the ruling classes know they cannot let their actions speak for themselves that they must deny the innocence of becoming. They must invent orders and magnitudes of sin

and guilt, categorize their opponents as blameworthy, as transgressors and criminals, devise the appropriate punishments, none too brutal, and justify all of this at a distance from the real world — by inventing an otherworldly layer of morality with which to cloak and embellish their violence. The most absurd and shameless excuses will be invented just to hide the fact that the ruling class is acting in its own interests — it will promise everyone that it is acting in the interests of justice, the community, the common good, the nation, or even the working class. It is the most monstrous, hypocritical, blood-thirsty, and vengeful figures who feel the need to compensate for their actions with the language of morality and justice. Why are the working-class revolutionaries, on the other hand, capable of taking pride in their honesty? Because for them, this falsifying, moralizing cloak is not needed. It is not morality, justice, civilization, or God that speaks through them, but their own thirst for life, and they do not need to speak on behalf of anyone but themselves — no excuses for the terror.

> The active, aggressive, over-reaching man is still a hundred paces nearer to justice than the man who reacts; he simply does not need to place a false and prejudiced interpretation on the object of his attention, like the man who reacts does, has to do. In fact, this explains why the aggressive person, as the stronger, more courageous, nobler man, has always had a clearer eye, a better conscience on his side…
>
> — Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*[15]

If overcoming guilt is possible, this overcoming can only be carried out by a revolutionary class — one that *speaks for itself* — this entails *self-determination*. This is because the workers, in the course of a revolution, do not operate on the basis of a calculus of equivalences, the kind of which lies at the basis of guilt — payback. They do not have to exchange like for like, punishment for crime, guilt for sin. It is with them that humanity can tear away the “image” overlaid on crime, and cease being *pale*.

The young Marx wrote that, once the criticism of religion is complete, once, in other words, the death of God is apprehended, its result is "the categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being."[16] What is immensely interesting about this passage is Marx's use of the Kantian Moral term "categorical imperative," which was otherwise by no means a part of Marx's regular vocabulary. Kant used the phrase to refer to actions that were good in-themselves, regardless of all possible consequences — duties demanded by universal moral law. He famously used it to uphold standard moral prohibitions, such as lying and theft. The imperative is categorical, as opposed to hypothetical, because it is valid under all circumstances, for all times and places.

Kantian morality is something that Marx, on the face of it, is opposed to, as he opposed all morals of an abstract nature. The highly historicizing, practical and strategizing nature of Marx's thought is also generally contrary to the idea that something could be judged as absolutely good, independently of its surrounding context, circumstances and potential consequences. What is interesting, therefore, is how *subversive* Marx's use of this Kantian term is.

Nietzsche ridiculed Kant and his moral philosophy for its emphasis on passive obedience to the moral law. Given that all morality is partially self-validating, Nietzsche suggests that Kantian morality was Kant's way of legitimizing himself, as if saying, "the worthy thing about me is that I can obey — and it *should* be the same for you as it is for me!"[17] Marx's categorical imperative, however, consists not in obedience to a pre-existing law, but in active, *transformative* activity — the *overthrowing* of social relations; namely, all social relations that impede a human being's self-affirmation. The subversion is even more striking when one remembers that Kant explicitly *denied* people the right to revolution — to revolt against a government to him was by definition *not right*, because it is the government

itself that would have to authorize the revolt to make it “right.” Marx was definitely aware of the irony of using a Kantian phrase to not only lift the prohibition on revolution, but to make an imperative out of it.

But the use of the term is not reducible to subversion and irony. The subversion itself would be ineffective as a rhetorical tool if there wasn’t something appropriate to the use of the term, and that appropriateness reveals something important about how Marx views human emancipation. The revolution is not of merely instrumental value, a value-neutral means to achieve something valuable. Something required only for the consequences it produces, i.e., for its use as an instrument, would be, in Kant’s language, a *hypothetical* imperative — *if* one wishes to quench one’s thirst, for instance, one has a hypothetical imperative to drink water. Marx’s uncharacteristic use of “categorical imperative” signals that the revolution for him is not like this. A successful revolution, without a doubt, would fulfil many instrumental needs, but the central motivation behind it is deeper than that; it goes beyond particular instances even of the procurement of food and the acquisition of shelter. If there is anything remotely close to a moral law in Marx, it is this: to resist dehumanization is valuable in itself, *even* if the revolution *fails* in the end. This is not because of anything like obedience and submission to the Moral law. Rather, it is because in resisting dehumanization, one seeks to affirm one’s *very existence* as a *value-creating* being, and the *value* of that is something that transcends all instrumental values.

There is an obvious objection to this stance — is not such opposition to dehumanization precisely a principle of Morality of the kind that Nietzsche attacked? For Nietzsche, the human being, like all living things, was a fundamentally contingent, historical, continuously changing creature. To impose an eternal, reified system of Morality on it would therefore be to disfigure and obscure humanity’s true nature as a changing historical being. But this is precisely what dehumanization does to a person: it imposes an

essence on them, makes them static, passive, and unchanging. To oppose dehumanization is not, therefore, an example of the type of Morality Nietzsche opposed — to the contrary, it is only by opposing dehumanization that we can come to an honest understanding of what we, as humanity, are; or more precisely, what we, as humanity, are always in the process of becoming.

10

What happens to slave morality, resentment, the ascetic ideal when life is finally affirmed? To answer this requires us to examine a dialectical concept used by both Marx and Nietzsche: the *Aufhebung*.

The German word *Aufhebung*[*] has often given headaches to translators, as it contains several contradictory meanings, which are not adequately captured in any single English word. Three particular meanings express its role in dialectics: *cancelling*, *preserving*, and *lifting up*. The contradictory meanings are appropriate, because the concept refers to a dialectical motion which simultaneously cancels, preserves, and lifts up; in which the abolition of one element replaces that element with something new, while nevertheless preserving within itself the preceding dialectical process. As an example, communism for Marx is an *Aufhebung*: it *cancels*, meaning that it abolishes class society; it *preserves*, meaning that it nevertheless preserves the forces of production developed throughout the past history of class society; and it *lifts up*, in that the initial historical stage of pre-class society — primitive communism — is in the final stage reproduced, but on a higher level, an advanced stage, *lifted up*: communism, but no longer primitive. This is why an *Aufhebung* ends in what is sometimes referred to as *the negation of the negation*: class society emerges as private property negates primitive communism (first negation); a communist revolution negates private property in turn (negation of the negation); the resulting stage is not merely a return to primitive communism, but its “lifting up”

into a higher phase. For Nietzsche, life-affirmation, or the advent of the *Übermensch*, is an *Aufhebung*. It *cancels* the dominance of resentment and guilt, it cancels Morality and the ascetic ideal; it *preserves* the capacities humans developed in the grip of the ascetic ideal, such as the capacity for self-reflection and self-discipline; finally, it *lifts up*, in that it brings back that pre-social stage at which human instincts had not yet been repressed, but it reproduces it on a higher level, now combining those instincts with the power of self-reflection and self-discipline that was made possible by the development of the ascetic ideal.

This is just one example of the dialectical flourishes in Nietzsche's thought which are akin to those of Marx. Nietzsche even uses the very term *Aufhebung* in describing such processes. In the *Genealogy of Morality*, he writes that justice ends by undergoing a *Selbstaufhebung* (self-*Aufhebung*); and although he preferred the German word *Sublimierung*, (much more easily translated as "sublation"), the Latin origin of the word — *sublimare* — is translated in German as, once again, *aufheben*. One section in *The Genealogy* even puts forth nothing less than a dialectical *law*, in no uncertain terms: "All great things bring about their own demise through an act of self-sublimation [*Selbstaufhebung*]: that is the law of life, the law of *necessary* 'self-overcoming' in the essence of life, — the lawgiver himself is always ultimately exposed to the cry: '*patere legem, quam ipse tulisti*' [submit to the law you have yourself made]."[18]

The historical process described in the *Genealogy* begins with master morality, involving the vigour and vitality of the nobles, which is then negated by the slave revolt (first negation). However, when life will once again be affirmed, and a revaluation of values is undergone, this will constitute *the negation of the negation*, consummating the *Aufhebung*. It is important to note the element of "lifting up" in the final negation, as this overcoming is the reason Nietzsche is decidedly *not* a reactionary, at least if we understand a reactionary as being someone who wants society to return

to a previously existing condition. A common misconception about Nietzsche is that he wants to return to Homeric Greece, more generally to the previously existing, ancient, master morality, against the currently existing slave morality, so that the new transvaluation of values is a mere *reversal* — a return to the way things were prior to the slave revolt. This is completely false, and not just because such a return would be plainly impossible. As the negation of the negation implies, Nietzsche no more wants to return to the ancient form of master morality than Marx wants to return to primitive communism. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he charts three stages in the development of morality, entirely in line with the notion of *Aufhebung*: the pre-moral stage, the moral stage, and the *extra*-moral stage. This categorization alone makes clear that the final, extra-moral stage, the abolition of Morality, is not a mere return to the pre-moral, but an entirely new development.

This can be further elucidated through *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. When the titular character descends from a mountain after ten years of solitude, the first man he encounters is the Saint in the woods, who is surprised that Zarathustra would want to "go under" — "You lived in your solitude as if in the sea, and the sea carried you. Alas, you want to climb ashore? Alas, you want to drag your own body again?"[19] Here, Nietzsche was influenced by and alluding to the findings of the biology of his time, from which he learned that animals used to live in the sea, but gradually emerged to land as they developed legs to bear the weight which previously had been borne by the sea. It is clear then what the sea signifies for the Saint: to be without burden, to be carried, to float, rather than to use one's own legs. Zarathustra's refusal to "stay in the sea" is essentially an attack on all those reactionaries whose goal is to return to a glorified past before humans "developed legs," so to speak — the Saint expresses a desire to deny and reject crucial past development, rather than to *aufheben* it. As manifestations of this Saint we can list many varieties of traditionalists,

reactionary socialists, feudalists, and anarcho-primitivists — those who look back to a distant past as if to a Garden of Eden, and resent the development that transformed it, wishing that the entire history of industrial development had never happened. They are incapable of what Nietzsche calls "*amor fati*," love of faith, which affirms the past even in its errors — "even life's *mistakes* have their own sense and value, the temporary byways and detours, the delays, the 'modesties', the seriousness wasted on tasks which lie beyond *the* task."[20] The ideal of returning to a glorified past appears analogously both at the collective-historical level and the individual-personal level — Nietzsche could have greatly resented his early dedication to academic philology, which kept him from pursuing his real passion in philosophy; yet towards the end of his life, he comes to affirm it, as something that was painful, but crucial in the process of his becoming-Nietzsche; and he is right. Nietzsche as we know him would not exist without the years spent parsing through ancient texts, enduring the academic life, and tirelessly teaching the young. Nietzsche's perspective of *amor fati* takes the pain and tediousness of this experience and affirms it as a crucial aspect in the development of the whole.

So long as we, as socialists, do not view history from the perspective of *amor fati*, we will be eternally resentful of the past; we will curse it, and it in turn will drag us down, away from the present, with our backs towards the future. It is the easiest thing to blame the past for its manner of transpiring, to see each prior moment as a condemnation, to accuse the past of delaying the future or letting the present come too late. But this won't achieve anything more than sapping people of their present energy and using it to fuel the image of a wrongful past instead, which will stand before us as an obstacle. *Amor fati* means cooperation with the past: to love fate means to see the past as having been necessary for the development of oneself and one's goals, and as having planted the seeds for future transformations; and, at the very least, wherever in a moment of the past the

negative seems to prevail, and affirming it seems impossible, one should see in it something that is waiting to be affirmed in the future.

To return to the biological metaphor, leaving the sea is a burden, but Zarathustra welcomes it, as it is the only thing that gives rise to new evolutionary possibilities. Those who idealize the past would prefer us to amputate our legs, but even that would not allow us to return to the water — we would remain on land, only now with missing limbs, and is this not a great analogy for the political reactionary? The reactionary, under the guise of "returning to tradition," to pre-modernity, would have us "amputate" all that modernity has developed, and would in the end still not be capable of negating it. There's only one option: we must use our legs to go further. To illustrate the *Aufhebung* visually, one could point out that to strengthen our legs to the point of fully mastering and controlling our weight would not be a return to floating in the water, but an entirely new development, which returns in one respect to the first stage (being unburdened by our weight) but in combination with the second (our possession of legs, making us capable of new evolutions) — the development is *aufheben* so that what was burdensome and alienating is made into something affirmative and powerful.

If this interpretation of Nietzsche seems like a stretch, let's hear it from Nietzsche himself, as he makes his rejection of all regressive development as explicit as one possibly could in *Twilight of the Idols*:

> *A word in the conservative's ear*. — What people did not use to know, what people these days do know, can know —, a *regressive development* or turnaround in any way, shape, or form is absolutely impossible. This is something that we physiologists, at least, do know. But all priests and moralists have believed that it was possible, — they *wanted* to set humanity back — *to cut humanity down* — to an *earlier* level of virtue. Morality was always a Procrustean bed. Even politicians have imitated the preachers of virtue on this point: there are parties even today that dream about a world of crabs, where everything *walks backwards*. But no one is free to be a crab. It is no use: we *have to* go forwards, and I mean *step by step further into decadence* (–this is *my* definition of modern "progress"…). You can inhibit this development and even dam up the degeneration through inhibition, gather it together, make it more violent and *sudden*: but that is all you can do.–[21]

The development into decadence which Nietzsche refers to here corresponds to a similar development as analyzed by Marx (which would later become one of the accelerationists' main influences), according to which capital has to develop and expand before it can be abolished. We can't wind back its clock. We cannot turn back the clock to before the slave revolt happened either, and we would not even want to. For Nietzsche, master morality prior to the slave revolt might have been life-affirming, but it was still *dumb* — dumb in the sense in which unconscious matter is dumb, it lacks all the conscious tensions, splits, dualities, oppositions, and conflicts that characterize interesting people. Nietzsche describes the pre-social beasts of prey as "artists," but still "involuntary, unconscious" ones — powerful and daring, but incapable of shaping themselves and their world *consciously*.

We could thus conceive the negation of the negation Nietzsche hopes for also as concerning the elements of "instinct" and "conscience." In the first phase of the dialectic, the masters affirm their instincts — they live impulsively, immediately discharge their urges, and roam free. However, such pure instinctiveness is capable of creating neither consistent social structures nor culture, and in this primitive phase the human being can hardly be distinguished from an animal. Whether they like it or not, one of the masters' instincts is the creation of social structures, as such creation provides both an additional outlet for their instincts, and helps to fulfil their material needs more regularly. However, social structures of a significant size cannot be maintained merely by the impulsive discharge of instinct: they require a level of regularity, predictability and restraint among the people that make up those structures. Thus, through a process of violent social education and punishment, the mass of the people is taught to stay within the boundaries required by the maintenance of the social system. All the instincts that were previously discharged freely are now repressed and

internalized, finally shaping “conscience,” and we enter the second phase of the dialectic: conscience emerges, but as a *negation* of instinct.

If conscience was the negation of instinct, then *its* further negation will bring about the transvaluation of values — the *Übermensch*, where the two elements of the dialectic are sublated: the negation of the negation recovers the joyful instinctiveness of the first phase, and negates the second phase, while nevertheless preserving what is positive in it — the capacity for regularity, and therefore promise-making, and the entire development of consciousness and reflection. The result is the achievement of self-control and self-directedness: the instincts are no longer indiscriminately discharged (first phase), nor indiscriminately repressed (second phase). Instead, consciousness itself “has penetrated him to his lowest depths and become an instinct, his dominant instinct.”[22] Instinct and consciousness no longer appear as irreconcilable elements seeking to negate one another — consciousness itself becomes a source of instinct.

As usual, an analogy with Marx is present, as he also emphasizes the goal of self-mastery and conscious deliberation. The first phase (primitive communism) involves communal ownership and collective social deliberation, but under the pressure of scarcity and submission to the forces of nature. The second phase (class society) ends up eradicating scarcity and dominating nature, but negates the element of collective social deliberation from the first phase, so that the abundance of goods cannot be consciously distributed according to needs, leading to crises of overproduction. Finally, the third phase brings about a negation of the negation — communism. Here, the collective social deliberation from the first phase is recovered, and the second phase, characterized by private property, is negated, while nevertheless maintaining its positive element: the production of abundance. Humanity can now direct its own course, and make decisions consciously and freely, as social deliberation, contrary to the first phase, is no longer limited by scarcity or domination by the forces of nature.

Nietzsche says that today's greatest individuals harbour an *amalgamation* of master and slave morality — the dialectical language I have brought up clarifies why — this is an instance of sublation. The slave revolt denies life, but it also carves out an *inner* life in people, it splinters them, it makes it possible to battle against oneself, to reflect on oneself and decide that there is a still higher ideal to strive towards. Humanity has to *invent* God before it can *kill* it, to *accumulate* capital before it can *destroy* it, and to *suffer* meaninglessness before it can *overcome* it. *This* is the dynamic denoted by the negation of the negation, which is always simultaneously a *positive, creative* motion.

Dialectical thought emphasizes the ways in which entities can be constituted by conflicting, opposing tendencies — capitalism, for instance, may from a narrow perspective seem like a stable system, and yet it can only exist on the basis of fundamental oppositions, such as that between labour and capital. When such oppositions grow past a certain threshold, the very entity whose existence depends upon them cannot endure the tension and is transformed or collapses. For instance, the ascetic ideal, as identified by Nietzsche, is constituted by a fundamental opposition: the worldview that understands the universe as God's creation sees the truth (knowledge of this creation) as sacred and good in itself, as revealing the will of God, and yet, this very same will-to-truth, as it develops towards a breaking point, ends up undermining the very theistic worldview from which it arose. The internal tendencies of nihilism grow to the point of undermining each other and destroying that which binds them.

A dialectical approach, therefore, allows us to see the ways in which tendencies towards change and the potential for transformation are created by the operations of the very entity one seeks to overcome — its internal functioning creates the conditions for its own destruction. Such an approach is, in a broad sense, revolutionary, as it inherently seeks out, in whatever it is analyzing, opportunities for its transformation and overcoming. This is

one of the reasons it is completely misguided to separate, as some "Marxians" do, Marx's analysis of capital from his socialist politics or revolutionary activity. Capitalism, *by its very nature* contains within itself the active possibility of its abolition, and can only function by simultaneously producing the conditions for its own destruction — to understand capitalism is therefore to anticipate its destruction. It is no different for Nietzsche — nihilism, after all, is not a platform that humanity could settle on — it is only a tightrope to traverse. It makes perfect sense that Nietzsche picked the Iranian spiritual leader Zoroaster, who was credited with pioneering the invention of the metaphysical opposition between good and evil, to be the representative of the first *great immoralist*. The one who gives birth to an entity by the same act generates the conditions for its passing away.

All of this leads to the final crucial aspect of Marx's and Nietzsche's central *Aufhebung*: given the fact that the possibility of overcoming is found within, latent in the internal constitution of things, the *Aufhebung* must involve the abolition of the very agent carrying it out.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, this fact is denoted by the German word *Untergang*, which makes Nietzsche's dialectical flourishes even more undeniable. *Untergang*, multifarious in its meaning like *Aufhebung*, is used to mean "setting," as in "the setting of the sun," but it can also be translated as a "going under," as well as a "downfall" or "destruction," and these various meanings are played with throughout the book. The first meaning emerges specifically in reference to the sun — the sun shines light not only over the mountains but goes under and gives light to the underworld too. Zarathustra too must go under and give light to the depths of the world. At the same time, *Untergang* is in several senses a step in the process of becoming *Übermensch* — first, in the sense that the human must become *earthly* — descend back from the heavens, so to speak: affirm one's sensuousness rather than a false transcendence; secondly, in the sense that

the human must experience the *depths* of life — even that which resides in the underworld. But most importantly, in undergoing this process, the human must go under, this time in the sense of *destruction* — the human must be destroyed so that the *Übermensch* can emerge — indeed, these are only two sides of a single process.

The human destroys itself just as the proletariat abolishes itself. Once again, it is important to recognize this so as not to misunderstand revolution or transvaluation as a mere reversal — a reversal of the relation between worker and capitalist, or between master and slave — a sublation is *not* a reversal. This is because the worker for Marx, and the slave for Nietzsche, are defined *relationally*, and their abolition entails therefore the abolition of their opposite too. Failing to recognize this point, many interpretations of Marx have fallen into workerism — the glorification and eternalization of the worker. But there is nothing revolutionary about the reproduction of the worker *as* worker. That is nothing but the reproduction of capitalism itself, because the worker exists *only* in opposition to capital, and the reproduction of one requires the reproduction of the other. At the All-Russia Congress of Transport Workers in 1921, Lenin recalled seeing a placard with an inscription saying, “The reign of the workers and peasants will last forever.” Reflecting on this proclamation, he said, “there you have some of the fundamental and elementary things we are still confused about. Indeed, if the reign of the workers and peasants would last forever, we should never have socialism, for it implies the abolition of classes; and as long as there are workers and peasants, there will be different classes and, therefore, no full socialism.”[23]

The worker’s capacity for revolution consists not in one’s own reproduction as worker, but, in fact, the worker’s capacity to *abolish* oneself as worker: “When the proletariat is victorious, it by no means becomes the absolute side of society, for it is victorious only by abolishing itself and its

opposite." Hence, Zarathustra proclaims, "I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself and thus perishes.–"[24]

11

The ascetic ideal has created the conditions for its own abolition; the self-reflection and universal evaluation it has made possible creates the grounds for universal love. It is *love*, of a certain sort, that is capable of replacing all moralizing, all blame and revenge. Love of life, love of humanity; love as Eric Fromm defines it: not "a relationship to a specific person" but "an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole."[25] But such love happens at two stages, and develops according to the dialectical process we've elucidated. At its first stage, love is naïve and uncritical, and necessarily incomplete. A person who strives to love and affirm completely while never moving past this first stage can only be what Nietzsche calls the "ass," the "all-complacent," who chews and digests everything, who always says "hee-yaw,"[26] who's yes-saying is only a yes-saying to nihilism. What some people present as universal love and optimism is in effect only self-satisfied indifference, if not disguised resentment and impotent vengeance, and its incapacity to negate is an incapacity for self-transformation. To go beyond, this love must be negated, and the spirit must learn how to despise, because there is much that is despicable in the world, and a love that hasn't faced this is only foolishness. Love is negated so that one can learn how to destroy. In the course of this process, a space for the new is cleared, destruction becomes awareness of one's power, and begins to flow in limitless creativity. Thus the despising is *aufheben*, the negation is negated. Love is reproduced, but on a higher stage, now enriched by an awareness of what love requires, and the sacrifices it demands. Only at this stage is one truly granted the right to love. Nietzsche lists as one of the "great crimes in psychology," that "love has been falsified as surrender (and altruism), while it is an appropriation or

a bestowal following from a superabundance of personality. Only the most complete persons can love; the depersonalized, the ‘objective,’ are the worst lovers.”[27]

As has been said, radicalism is diametrically opposed to moralizing. A person in whom the development of love was carried through to the end, in whom the instinct for emancipation became absolute and all-encompassing, such a person would no longer despise even that which, on the face of it, is most repulsive. Not because of a return to complacency, but because both complacency and loathing would be replaced by the consideration and understanding of the underlying causes of the repulsive, and a will to change them. Such a person, in whom the innocence of becoming was embodied, would no longer see anyone as a sinner, moral transgressor, or evil-doer, and instead would look for the path of utmost affirmation, into which even those who were branded as great sinners could be elevated.

Zarathustra is gentle to the sick. Indeed, he is not angered by their ways of comfort and ingratitude. May they become convalescents and overcomers and create for themselves a higher body!

— Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*[28]

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* “*Aufhebung*” is the noun, “*aufheben*” is the verb.

IV: Historical Philosophy, Philosophical History

> All philosophers have the common failing of starting out from man as he is now and thinking they can reach their goal through an analysis of him. They involuntarily think of "man" as an *aeterna veritas* [eternal truth], as something that remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things. Everything the philosopher has declared about man is, however, at bottom no more than a testimony as to the man of a very limited period of time. Lack of historical sense is the family failing of all philosophers.
>
> — Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*[1]

> History is what hurts. It is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis.
>
> — Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*[2]

1

Philosophy is, like any human activity, always historical, whether the philosopher recognizes it or not. While the Medieval Christian philosophers, when speaking of God, believed their object of study to be eternal, absolute, and outside history, they were expressing a historical moment, characterized by the dominant political power of the Christian Church. When the early liberal thinkers spoke of eternal, inalienable, natural rights, they were expressing the historical ascendancy of the bourgeois class. And so too, when John Rawls was speaking of the universal validity of justice through a farcical repetition of social contract theory, he represented the historical *old age* of liberalism. All of the aforementioned philosophies tended to identify a group of people with special access to this ahistorical truth in a combination of knowledge and political authority (from mystics and priests to state representatives and academics) and so had to "divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society,"[3] as Marx would say.

Yes, Marx and Nietzsche themselves are expressions of a historical period — of modernity, of capitalism, of liberalization, of the growth of history as a discipline. There couldn't have been anything like a Marx or a Nietzsche before the nineteenth century, any more than there could've be a Plato or St. Aquinas in our century. Many of the philosophical similarities between Marx and Nietzsche can be explained by their shared historical and cultural context. They were both shaped by Greek antiquity, which was heavily prioritized in German education, they were shaped by German Romanticism, by German Idealist philosophy and the Young Hegelians; both lived at a time when modernity was rapidly intruding into Germany, and both defined themselves in opposition to the present state of things, marked as it was by social contradictions and unrest.

Philosophy arises and develops *in* history — even the fact that Marx and Nietzsche *understood* this is itself an outcome of a historical process — of the growing importance of "the historical sense," whose modern form only became possible with the French Revolution. The philosopher originally took the shape of the priest or the mystic, and so, for a long time, philosophy was defined by what was outside history, above history, or independent of history. Philosophy was about the timeless, and to acknowledge the primacy of historical change was seen as something *beneath* philosophy. The emergence and wide popularization of historical philosophy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was due to history itself: The Industrial Revolution, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution — all of these events forced people to become aware of historical change and how violently it can transform the foundations of social life. History was becoming more radiant than ever, harder to ignore, knocking on philosophy's door.

Richard Rorty has argued that the philosopher's social role is to mediate between the old and the new — between the established, conventional, traditional, and the revolutionary, progressive, subversive — the

philosopher, in other words, helps society ease into historical change. In Hegel's case, we could say that one such mediation was that between the demands of the nation-state on the one hand, as it required absolute and unwavering legitimation, and the rise of historical awareness on the other, which was teaching people about the arbitrariness and fragility of all existing political regimes. Hegel's philosophy was an exercise in letting history in through the door, but only after disarming and neutralizing it. History can be a powerful critical tool, but the philosophy of the Prussian establishment could not accept critical tools, and Hegel could only make philosophy historical, and history philosophical, by cutting its movement off at the present, by positing the Prussian state as the final political realization of philosophy — the final fulfilment of historical development. For a while, this was a successful solution — Hegel acknowledged history by transforming his thought into a dam, blocking its further movement. This did not last long. History was not finished, as its waves grew *more* violent in the hands of the growing proletariat, which had no place in Hegel's conceptual system, and the dam was finally shattered by the explosive revolutions happening all around Europe. With one revolutionary explosion after another, it became increasingly hard to believe Hegel's claim that historical development had already been in some significant sense completed. Despite its reactionary aspects, Hegelian philosophy did provide radicals with an essential principle — the connection between philosophical thought and political action, as Hegel said that in classical German philosophy, "revolution was lodged and expressed as if in the very form of their thought."[4] Hegel theorized that philosophy is something that is only fulfilled when it is realized in real-world social conditions. Yes, the Hegelian radicals said, but this fulfilment is yet to come.

Critical philosophers took over Hegel's historical philosophy, his dialectic, and his insight on the relation between philosophy and revolution, and proceeded, but now without the deadlock stopping history's further

development. In this process, the thought of Marx and Nietzsche was born — hence, their unforgiving historicizing. Historical thought wielded by them is a hammer — it smashes, and it builds. While France was revolutionary in its politics, and Britain was revolutionary in its economic production, Germany found its revolution in philosophy.

What we witness at the end of Nietzsche's Wagnerian period is nothing less than the *intrusion of history* into Nietzsche's thought. At every step, historical situatedness replaces what, under the influence of Schopenhauer, was previously understood as eternal. This is not to deny that Nietzsche had a sense for the historical from the very beginning, but it was hindered by transcendental principles. The maturation of Nietzsche's thought required that whatever was before seen as unchanging would come to be seen as emerging from historical processes — developing over an extended period of time, this process grew its ripest fruit with *The Genealogy of Morals*. The refusal to historicize is not just a theoretical dead-end; it's an essential element of life-denial — to think and act in ignorance of history is to deny the becoming that defines life.

2

Nietzsche's relation to historical thought might initially be confusing, given his attacks on "historicism." If he's an unforgiving historicizer, how come he labels that condition of modern man in which one is complacently "pleased at anything" with the term "the historical sense"?[5] What about his claim that "[t]he historical sense makes its servants passive"?[6] To understand these propositions without qualification, as addressing all history and historical thought, would make it impossible to understand Nietzsche, as he himself points out that a "[l]ack of historical sense is the family failing of all philosophers."[7]

We can distinguish the target of Nietzsche's critique by referring to it specifically as "historicism," differentiated from history, historical thought,

or historicizing. To start with, like most things in Nietzsche, the historical sense is a matter of degree, and so many of his critical statements are qualified by reference to a particularly high *degree* or an *excess* of the historical, where it passes a certain threshold beyond which it becomes harmful. In criticizing such excess, he anticipates the kind of cultural critiques of postmodernity that became popular in the second half of the twentieth century — the condition in which people are so bloated with historical knowledge that they are no longer capable of being selective, and by extension creative; everything to them is equally worthy of attention, and cultural products become haphazard mishmashes of the past. Historical knowledge takes up so much space that none is left for anything new. It is precisely such excess that Nietzsche criticizes as leading people to be "pleased at anything" but reverent of nothing — "the power of gradually losing all feelings of strangeness or astonishment, and finally being pleased at anything, is called the historical sense, or historical culture."[8] But the opposite of excess — a complete *lack* of historical sense, is not much better. A person incapable of historicizing is described by Nietzsche as a "beast" — an animal grazing on the pasture; enjoying a certain contentment, but lacking both a past and a future, lacking, thereby, meaning itself — living in an endless, senseless present.

But there *is* also a type of historicism that Nietzsche criticizes *as such*, regardless of degree: the *Hegelian* type, which Nietzsche identifies not just with Hegel himself, but more strongly with those he perceives as reproducing Hegel, such as David Strauss and Eduard von Hartmann. Throughout his scattered remarks, there are four related reasons for Nietzsche's rejection of the Hegelian kind of historicism:

1. The first is its reliance on transcendence — its metaphysical discontinuity. Even if this discontinuity is, in a sense, crossed at the end of history, there is life-denial in the idea that real, sensuous

history is subordinate to something independent of its contingencies, a Spirit distinguished from the accidents of time, which seeks its fulfilment in a pre-determined goal. For Marx and Nietzsche, history consists in the processes and developments that living, breathing, *suffering* human beings engage in and undergo, embedded in the conditions and circumstances of their lives, and nothing besides — not Spirit, not the Idea, not a Telos.

2. The second element Nietzsche rejects is the anthropomorphic falsification of the universe. He is addressing it, without explicitly referring to Hegel, in *The Gay Science*, when he asks: “are we then supposed to reinterpret what is inexpressibly derivative, late, rare, accidental, [i.e., the organic] which we perceive only on the crust of the earth, as something essential, common, and eternal, as those people do who call the universe an organism? This nauseates me.”[9] In other words, Hegel takes qualities only found in the organic, like intention and purposiveness, and applies them to the world as a whole, making them central and essential instead of the fringe accidents they really are. The emergent is confused with what it emerges from.
3. The third element of Hegelian historicizing Nietzsche strongly rejects, clearly inseparable from the first two, is its teleology. The peculiarly human quality of having and seeking a purpose is extended to history as a whole. The idea that history proceeds according to a more-or-less linear, in any case logical, progression for Nietzsche seemed insufferably naïve. And more generally, he believed that purpose is never *inherent* to entities at all — purpose arises in a given entity only when imposed onto it by a stronger, successfully dominating force. People often mistakenly attribute historical teleology to Marx, as if he materialized and naturalized history while somehow retaining that transcendental subject whose

goal would guide it. But Marx couldn't be more clear in *The German Ideology* that history "can be speculatively distorted so that later history is made the goal of earlier history … Thereby history receives its own special aims and becomes 'a person rating with other persons' … while what is designated with the words 'destiny,' 'goal,' 'germ,' or 'idea' of earlier history is nothing more than an abstraction formed from later history, from the active influence which earlier history exercises on later history."[10] He furthermore makes his general anti-teleology clear when he praises Darwin for "deal[ing] the death-blow to 'teleology' in the natural sciences."[11] The teleological reading of Marx came only with later Marxists, who were typically seeking to legitimize some party or state and drawing from non-Marxist influences, culminating in works like Stalin's monstrosity *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* — amazingly, as teleological as the worst of Hegelianism, yet chillingly positivistic and mechanistic, without the dialectical and human elements at least present in Hegel. The only purposes, properly so called, present in Marx's thought are the finite purposes of individual human beings in time. For Hegel, this is merely the "finite-teleological standpoint," which is superseded by the higher standpoint of Absolute Spirit. Besides this, there are, in Marx, only those evolutionary functions identified by Darwin that can be called purposive only *metaphorically*, in that their "purpose" (to speak more accurately, their tendency) is their own reproduction and propagation. They involve explanations, but not justifications. Nietzsche, despite his (misguided)[12] criticism of Darwinian theory, himself believed in this form of evolutionism, propounding the idea that every being has a tendency towards a higher, more intensified, more capable form of itself, and in the process makes use of whatever cards it has been dealt.

4. The final rejection is the one most clearly exemplifying the radical and subversive nature of Nietzsche's thought — Nietzsche's repulsion at the way in which Hegel glorifies the status quo. Because Hegel saw the Prussian state as the fulfilled self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit, he understood the entirety of the world's past history as leading up to it, and so his historical philosophy is a legitimation of the Prussian state. "What is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational,"[13] Hegel famously proclaimed. This statement, particularly with emphasis on the second half,[*] was most dear to the right-wing Hegelians, who used it to justify their political conservativism, and it is this that Nietzsche most strongly rejected. He saw in it the vain "standpoint of success," which, in opposition to all future-oriented philosophy, encourages complacency and tries to delegitimize all transformative change. Nietzsche summarized the matter in a notebook quite succinctly: "The *Hegelian* 'world process' culminated in a fat Prussian state with a capable police force."[14] Nietzsche despised Hegelian historicism insofar as it placed itself at the service of this state and police force, and pandered to a self-satisfied bourgeois audience. Not only is it a shameless tool of self-congratulation (most philosophy is), what is worst of all is that it tries to close its doors to the future.

> [Hegel] has implanted in a generation leavened throughout by him the worship of the "power of history" that turns practically every moment into a sheer gaping at success, into an idolatry of the actual …
>
> — Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Abuses of History*[15]

While Nietzsche would attack *any* philosophy for encouraging stagnation in subservience to the state, his aggression was no doubt intensified by his annoyance at Germany's triumphalism following its victory in the Franco-

Prussian War. While Nietzsche saw the French culture of the time as superior, the newly formed German Empire saw its military victory as proof of a cultural victory too, when it was ironically this very triumphalism that posed a threat to genuine culture. This is why, when attacking Hegelian philosophy and its derivatives, Nietzsche criticizes David Strauss and Eduard von Hartmann, but never any of the young Hegelians, of whom Marx was originally a part. After all, one of the most significant things the young Hegelians left *out* of their inheritance of the Hegelian philosophy was precisely this deification of the status quo, its "standpoint of success." Instead, they took elements of Hegelian thought, and turned it *around* on the state and *towards* the future. Perhaps the essence of radical critique could be said to lie in such an act — to turn a tool of legitimization into a weapon for attack. It could then be said that Nietzsche's project of radical critique started when he took Greek culture — at the time used in the German educational system as a reference point by which the German establishment could congratulate itself — and turned it around, transformed it into a reference point for *critique*, seeking to prove the comparatively *deficient* nature of German culture and its failure to live up to its own ideal. Marx and Engels took the Hegelian deification of the status quo, and through a dialectical reversal, transformed it into its opposite:

> In accordance with all the rules of the Hegelian method of thought, the proposition of the rationality of everything which is real resolves itself into the other proposition: All that exists deserves to perish.
> — Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*[16]

3

Nietzsche's approach to history was genealogical, as he called it. There are no necessary transhistorical laws in it, no absolute origins, no single linear logic of development. Necessities in history *do* exist, but only *within* particular historical periods: given the right set of preconditions, certain

social formations may manifest themselves according to a necessary logic, but this is never a logic applicable to history as a whole, and it is often followed by historical ruptures, breaches, and leaps. Complex social phenomena are rarely the results of a continuous, progressive development, traceable to a single starting point; they are more often a matter of multiple, originally independent, contingent social elements coming together into unity only over time, typically on the basis of various dominations and subjugations, artifices, and compulsions.

Raymond Geuss describes Nietzschean genealogy as the opposite of "tracing a pedigree," which tries to prove the *value* of a social phenomenon by tracing its hereditary line back to some point of absolute value (such as the monarch being legitimated as the descendant of Adam, or the president being legitimated as the political descendant of the founding fathers). For Nietzsche, the social value of a given thing is never secured by reference to a single point of origin (which more often than not is illusory) but exists only on the basis of continual processes of maintenance and protection, subject to transformations, shifts, and negations.

The appropriateness of this approach should be obvious if we consider Nietzschean and Marxist thought as being such socio-historical phenomena. We cannot trace them back to a saint, a prophet, or a holy text. Like with all social phenomena, a genealogical excavation reveals multiple layers, and digging through them uncovers only more and more disparate elements. Their meaning is "not just one meaning but a whole synthesis of 'meanings'"; the "history of [their] use for a variety of purposes, finally crystallizes in a kind of unity which is difficult to dissolve back into its elements, difficult to analyze and, this has to be stressed, is absolutely *undefinable*."[17] In other words, the thought of Marx and Nietzsche, much less their historical influence, can in no way be filtered down to some *essence*. There is no purification process for history, no honest way of escaping its transience and complexity. The works written by Marx himself

already exhibit such complexity, gathering together elements not just from the commonly cited trio of German philosophy, French politics, and English economics, but aesthetic, scientific, religious, and technological developments, Greek antiquity, literature from German romanticism to the works of Shakespeare, and a sprawling set of historical circumstances, both those of Marx's own lifetime and those of previous recorded history that would take an entire book to list. Consider how much this complexity grows once Marxism becomes an international movement.

Nietzsche understands the genealogical approach as insisting that "anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it; that everything that occurs in the organic world consists of *overpowering*, *dominating*, and in their turn, overpowering and dominating consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which their former 'meaning' and '*purpose*' must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated."[18] Thus, starting from the very beginning, Marx's thought has been requisitioned, re-interpreted, redirected not just by revolutionaries, but by reformist parties, state regimes, and academics. Each case varied according to what was emphasized and highlighted, what was re-phrased or shifted, what was ignored, overlooked, or erased. Consider, for instance, Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which upon publication were dismissed and ignored by the Soviet Union as belonging to Marx's immature Hegelian phase, but were given immense importance by Marxist-Humanists, and even played a central role in the thought of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. In each case, the requisition was successful to the extent that it possessed certain resources of power (social organization, capital, access to means of publication, distribution and popularization, etc.). The global dominance of the Marxist-Leninist interpretation could never have been secured and achieved such influence if not for all the capital expended on it, and this

example showcases very well that interpretation is also *domination*, as its propagation required dominating alternative interpretations of Marx, involving legal measures at home and the infiltration of communist parties abroad, ranging from censorship to incarceration to murder.

In other words, the development of a given entity is "certainly not its *progressus* towards a goal, still less is it a logical *progressus*, taking the shortest route with least expenditure of energy and cost, — instead it is a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subjugation exacted on the thing." Force, however, is never one-sided — genealogical histories include also "the resistances encountered every time, the attempted transformations for the purpose of defence and reaction, and the results, too, of successful countermeasures."[19] To analyze and interpret an entity genealogically itself adds to that entity's history, and such interpretation can be a form of resistance, a countermeasure not only against opposing forces that seek to appropriate the entity at hand, but also the forces that seek to dominate the very *interpreter*.

4

The Nazi appropriation of Nietzsche, then, has inescapably sedimented as a layer in the genealogy of his thought. It may have been a *mis*appropriation, a distortion, and a falsification, it may have been *antithetical* to Nietzsche, but none of that can wash away the marks of history. The interpretations of Nietzsche that became popular following WWII were to a considerable extent determined and framed according to either the manner in which the interpreter wanted to distance Nietzsche from Nazism, or else, the manner in which they held Nietzsche responsible for Nazism. Our engagements with Nietzsche have been marked by this history just as much as our engagements with Marx have been marked by Stalin's USSR, and the traces are still visible. I therefore find it unavoidable to go into the history of

Nietzsche's reception in the twentieth century. Not least because we owe it to Nietzsche to apply his own genealogical considerations to his own thought. To engage in Nietzsche's philosophy is to engage with history, but to engage with Nietzsche's history can itself be an engagement in philosophy.

Genealogical analysis is not limited to examining the entity being interpreted, appropriated, dominated. "[E]very purpose and use is just a *sign* that the will-to-power has achieved mastery over something less powerful, and has impressed upon it its own idea of a use function."[20] We understand an entity better when we understand the sense that was impressed onto it, but let us acknowledge the other side of this relationship too: by examining the sense that has been impressed onto it, we can also get a better understanding of the very will-to-power that is *doing* the impressing. The will-to-power, as Nietzsche understands it, manifests itself only in relation to other entities — in the dominations, appropriations, and resistances it undergoes. It is always expressed in concrete, material situations; in real, sensuous appropriations. The sense that a given quantum of will-to-power gives to an object can be read "semiotically" — as a sign or symptom of the kind of will-to-power that is being expressed in that sense-giving (strong or weak, affirming or negating, active or reactive). In this case, by examining the manner in which Nietzsche has been appropriated, we can also interpret the will-to-power that the Nazis expressed in these appropriations. For this purpose, it is also useful to compare it with the appropriation of Nietzsche by a very different will-to-power — the socialists of revolutionary Russia.

5

Walter Kauffman, one of the most influential twentieth-century readers of Nietzsche, interpreted him as an essentially *non*-political thinker, citing Nietzsche's self-identification as the "last antipolitical German."[21] Kauffman's reading was incorrect. To be *anti*-political is not to be *non*-

political — indifferent to or withdrawn from politics. For Nietzsche, it entailed resisting and *attacking* politics; criticizing the state, the political sphere, which itself is a political position. It entailed defending culture from encroachments by the state. Nietzsche was anti-political in the sense that Marx was too, in that he saw in politics something to be superseded — "There, where the state ends, only there begins the human being who is not superfluous; there begins the song of necessity, the unique and irreplaceable melody."[22] This is very different from being *un*political, refusing to address the political. As a strategy, however, Kauffman's reading made perfect sense, and was a success. After WWII, the association of Nietzsche with fascism was at its peak, among both academics and the general public. Kauffman intended to free Nietzsche scholarship and discussions from this stigma, and the *cleanest* way to do it was to cut him off from politics *tout court*.

The funny thing is that this same strategy was used back in 1916-18, but from the other end of the political spectrum. Thomas Mann wrote an article in 1916, two years later incorporated into *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, which attacked leftists for *politicizing* Nietzsche, and it came to be one of the most significant texts in popularizing Nietzsche among Germany's nationalist right. There too, Nietzsche is interpreted as essentially non-political, using the same quotation later used by Kauffman (but misquoting "antipolitical" as "non-political"), except there Nietzsche is presented as Germany's national representative, and this road is taken precisely to distance Nietzsche from his *left*-wing readers! Nietzsche, says Mann, criticized Germany only out of love…

During the transition into the 1900s, the understanding of Nietzsche as an essentially right-wing thinker was nowhere near as commonly presumed as it came to be during WWII. A considerable section of the politically active interpreters of Nietzsche in both Germany and Russia (and to an extent France and the United States) consisted of radicals and

revolutionaries, from both Marxist and anarchist traditions, or at the very least left-reformists.[*] Franz Mehring, from the revolutionary wing of the German Social Democratic Party, saw in Nietzsche a critic of bourgeois culture who could serve as a "moment of passage to socialism"[23] for the disaffected. Nietzsche's thought had been brought into the German social democratic movement in the 1890s by a group of radicals known as *Die Jungen*, who later formed the Association of Independent Socialists. *Die Jungen* were led by Bruno Wille who, as befits a Nietzschean, attacked the Social Democratic Party for becoming too comfortable in the bourgeois parliament at the expense of revolution, and its stagnant bureaucratization which was steadily moving away from the working class.

More widely, Nietzsche was associated with the expressionist movement, which was overwhelmingly left-wing. The expressionists' main unifying concern was the liberation of culture from the state, and with Nietzsche as support, they were active in opposing state expansion and militarism. *Der Sturm*, a magazine centred around expressionism (along with cubism, dada, and surrealism) put forth its mission statement, written by Rudolf Krutz, thus: "We don't want to entertain [the general public]. We want artfully to demolish their comfortable, eminently serious worldview. For we hold their seriousness to be a weariness of life, a provincial dullness, whose psychology Nietzsche had long ago described."[24]

Many of the expressionists came to see that taking the side of culture against the state also required taking the side of revolution against capital, and embraced socialism. Interestingly, two of the most philosophically prolific ones, the Nietzschean communists Kurt Hiller and Otto Gross, both placed a special emphasis on sexual liberation. Kurt Hiller was openly gay, and utilized Nietzsche's social critique to attack the social conservativism and sexual repression of bourgeois society, while also affirming his right to gay love in the language of Nietzschean individualism. In a classic speech for gay rights from 1928, he even directly quotes Nietzsche's *Daybreak*, in

which Nietzsche argues that procreation is neither the goal nor the necessary consequence of the sexual drive. Hiller distinguished himself from other thinkers by identifying a Nietzschean-philosophical ideal of the *geistig* ("spirited"). The *geistig* philosophers are Nietzschean legislators — those who go beyond objective description, beyond theorizing what *is*, and go on to theorize what *should be*; *create*, assert *new* values, set goals for society — "The *geistig* ones — what does that mean? It means … those who feel themselves responsible … not for the past, but for the future. To feel responsible: the experience of carrying a message; to suffer on the world fruitfully; to be possessed by the idea to improve it."[25] Throughout 1914-20, Hiller engaged in anti-war activism, and co-founded the Activist League, which, before its dissolution, was momentarily associated with the German revolutionary workers' councils, at which point it had changed its name to the Council of *Geistig* Workers. When Thomas Mann came out with his "non-political" reading of Nietzsche, Hiller responded:

> Thomas Mann quotes [Nietzsche]. He called himself the "last unpolitical German." … But that politics which made Nietzsche nauseous was the business of party flatheads and editorialists; It was precisely the absence of *Geist* in "personal" life which … tortured him, as much as the lack of *Geist* in contemporary philosophy unnerved him. Yet, his concept of *Geist* is the most political which can be imagined.

Otto Gross was a psychoanalyst, and identified Nietzsche's significance in the history of ideas primarily as a precursor to Freud, without whom Freudian psychoanalysis would not have been possible. What he found most valuable was Nietzsche's discovery of the relation between socialization and repression, which in class society inevitably produces pathologies. The will-to-power was given an explicitly psychological reading. Gross believed the examination of psychological repression to be essential for revolutionaries, because, prefiguring Wilhelm Reich, he argued that workers under bourgeois society are socialized into being submissive, a process aided by the patriarchal family structure. In resistance to it, he

advocated women's emancipation and free love. He also attacked the German Social Democratic Party, mockingly referring to their "real-political socialism" — the justification of compromise with bourgeois politics on practical grounds. "It is that democracy of the 'last men' which Nietzsche prophetically foresaw and from which the dictatorship of the proletariat should rescue the future of the human race."[26]

Nietzschean language, and defences of Nietzsche, would often show up in other left-wing magazines, such as *Die Aktion*, which would go on to become a medium for the voice of anti-nationalist socialist revolutionaries. In the magazine known as *Das Forum*, a notable text on Nietzsche came from its editor Wilhelm Herzog, during the revolutionary events of 1919, where Herzog placed Nietzsche on the side of the revolution:

> Nietzsche was no defender of the Communist Manifesto, much more the sharpest antipode of the socialist viewpoint. But he was a revolutionary, more clever, principled, unsparing, knowledgeable and critical of *bürgerlich* society than many of the Social Democratic leaders. He dissolved this *bürgerlich* society, its culture, its values, its beliefs, its patriotism, its morality; he unmasked, he mocked its mendacity, its narrow intellect; its arrogance, its hostility to *Geist*. … He created the vision of the *Übermensch* while his time created the presupposition for the *Untermensch*, for the beast whose degeneracy and excesses we are now experiencing.[27]

Herzog provided the period's clearest example of how one moves towards Marx *through* Nietzsche. Before ever embracing revolution, as a supporter of the Social Democratic Party, Herzog drew from Nietzsche the hope for a new culture, a new *Über*-humanity. Then, he saw that new humanity emerging through spontaneous revolutionary organizing, the formation of workers' councils; he saw how it revitalized intellectual life, how the revolution had brought intellectuals closer "to the roots of social life through penetrating study of historical, economic, political, and social relations."[28] At the same time, he saw how the Social Democratic Party actively tried to suppress such organizing, he saw the murder of Rosa

Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and he realized that the social democrats are not even just dupes of the bourgeoisie, they are willing participants.

> Whoever today uses the word democracy in a sense which is useful to them, whoever in the name of "democracy" defends the rights of the ruling class, whoever does not recognize the democracy of today as the most sanctimonious, most brutal, most ordinary dictatorship, but rather struggles for its preservation, is no longer mistaken, he lies.[29]

Herzog thus had the honesty to see that the *geistig* culture which he had dreamt of all along was only possible on the basis of the kind of revolutionary communism that had just seen a victory in Russia: "revolutionary socialism is creative, affirms the *Geist* and creates new values."[30]

This list of thinkers is by no means exhaustive, but it should give pause to those who try to naturalize Nietzsche's association with fascism, as if his philosophy is by nature more attractive to the right. Leftist readings of Nietzsche are not merely a recent phenomenon, and the battle with right-wing readings has been a protracted and intentional process, waged ever since Nietzsche's death.

6

Nietzsche was introduced to Russian discourse towards the end of the nineteenth century, primarily through *The Birth of Tragedy*. Russia was facing the kind of conditions that make Nietzscheans thrive — dissatisfaction with the existing regime, drastic cultural changes, rough living conditions, and the failures of war, as well as, of course, a growing revolutionary movement. The old world was visibly decaying, and people were expecting the birth of a new one. Everyone from revolutionaries and activists, to poets and philosophers, saw in Nietzsche a relevant figure: a demolisher of all that has become stale and an inventor of new values. Nietzsche was seen as a way out of the false dilemma between stagnant

traditionalism and the lifeless mechanistic rationalism of the West. Readers across all fields, especially the radical and the young, anticipated a new culture, a new myth, a new morality, a new human being, a new world, and took their Dionysian spirits into politics, social activities, literature, art, and theatre.

Interpretations of Nietzsche based primarily on *The Birth of Tragedy* must be taken with a grain of salt, as the book was written at such an early stage in Nietzsche's development, before the maturation of his thinking. Towards the end of his life, Nietzsche writes, in *Ecce Homo*, that all that is most valuable in *The Birth of Tragedy* has been overlooked or misunderstood because of the shadow of Wagner and Schopenhauer that still stood over that work. However, he identifies in it two most important innovations that stand tall above those shadows: the discovery of the Dionysian, and the critique of the Socratic man (i.e., the overly rationalistic, positivistic human). What is striking, however, is that these two elements, which Nietzsche salvages as the book's affirmative elements, are precisely *those* elements that were most valued by the *revolutionaries* in their reception of the work. If we compare, on the other hand, at the same time and place, the *right-wing* Russian Nietzscheans, the anti-socialist, anti-revolutionary Nietzscheans of the time, their reception of the work tended to emphasize, on the contrary, precisely the *life-negating* elements of the work, the Schopenhauerian-Wagnerian remnants of metaphysical dualism.

Among the radicals, Nietzsche's influence was palpable among the "nihilists" and the "populists," but the former sometimes fell into a cold rationalism and utilitarianism, and the latter tended to put too much emphasis on moral duty. It was the Nietzschean *Marxists* who generated through Nietzsche the most power, who lived his thought most genuinely, and they were by no means uncommon. Let us remember them.

Aleksander Bogdanov was the most prolific one. A fierce Marxist theorist and revolutionary, a co-founder of the Bolshevik faction, who was

later expelled as a rival to Lenin, and opposed the Bolshevik government from a left-Marxist standpoint, he is often remembered for having written the first work of Soviet science-fiction (*Red Star*), and credited as a forerunner of systems theory and cybernetics. “For me, Marxism includes the denial of the unconditional objectivity of any truth whatsoever, the denial of every eternal truth.”[31] In such words, he rejected the will-to-truth, and saw in socialism the basis for a “grandiose fullness of life.”[32] Revolution for him was an expression of free desire, and ethics merely a means to something greater: “socialist feeling, which makes people comrades in work and joy and suffering, will develop in complete freedom only when it throws off the fetishistic wrapping of all morality.”[33] He held a Nietzschean belief in the necessity of fully obliterating the old bourgeois culture, in favour of a new future-oriented culture. Despite his exclusion from the Bolshevik faction, he pursued this ideal in co-founding Proletkult, an experimental and independent institution for art and culture that made significant leaps towards this goal, before falling prey to party bureaucratization in the early 1920s, when the institution lost its autonomy, its next president being appointed by the Central Committee; this led to its decline, and finally abolition in 1932. Bogdanov resigned early on, 1921-22, and declined an offer for the post of Commissar of Enlightenment — culture and art, for him, were nothing if not autonomous. In his most popular work, the novel *Red Star*, Bogdanov’s attitude is expressed through the protagonist’s words: “She went into the revolution under the banner of duty and sacrifice, I under the banner of free desire… For [her] proletarian ethics was sacred in itself; I considered it a useful adaptation, necessary to the working class in its struggle, but transient, like the struggle itself and the life-system which generated it…”[34] He therefore fiercely opposed the idea that the individual has a duty to deny and sacrifice oneself for the “greater good.” Even his death came as an outcome of an intense passion he pursued out of free desire: as a scientist and physician, he pioneered the study and

practice of blood transfusion, which is what eventually led to his demise — despite immense successes in the field, his life ended when he injected himself with infected blood. Not unlike the tightrope walker in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, who, despite failing to traverse the tightrope and falling to his death, is honoured by Zarathustra: "You made your vocation out of danger, and there is nothing contemptible about that. Now you perish of your vocation, and for that I will bury you with my own hands."[35]

Stanislav Volski was an active Bolshevik before a decisive break with Lenin in 1917, a few years after which he was limited, despite his theoretical prowess (responsible for the most thorough Russian Marxist work on ethics of pre-Soviet times), to being a literary popularizer and translator. He died in the mid-1930s in unclear circumstances during Stalin's purges. Volski understood most clearly that the capitalist division of labour produces conformity, and is therefore contrary to individuality. Individuality is something only made possible through socialism, the variability of which lays the ground for individual self-determination, an uncompromising selfhood. The possibility of such individuality was described beautifully by him, when he compared revolution not to a "monotonous church psalm" but "a powerful symphony of the most varied instruments, combined in a single harmony by the forces of the elemental storm of history, yet preserving the entire fullness and depth of each individual self."[36] Like Nietzsche, he found joy and affirmation in struggle, even defining socialism as "freedom of struggle,"[37] and he sought in revolution and socialism a life where one can find joy in the destruction of obstacles — a realm of the Greek ideal of *Agon*, in which competition is conducive to the growth of social and cultural life, and even one's opponent can be loved *as* an opponent. The influence of the notion of *Übermensch* is evident when he describes the proletariat as "only the preface to mankind … a transition, a purging fire, the soil for a future harvest, an instrument for universally human creation."[38] "[P]recisely there, in the hazy distances of

the future, lies that which is most precious and sacred for the individual. … Only there is man proud, strong, bold and fair; only there, in harmony of feeling and all-encompassing knowledge, will grow the ruler of the universe, for whom our contemporary reality serves as a mere pedestal."[39]

Anatoly Lunacharsky, a Soviet Commissar for Ministry of Education, as well as a playwright and critic, is often remembered for his early advocacy of "God-Building." This was the idea, inspired by Feuerbach, early Marx, as well as Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, that people's spiritual needs could be fulfilled in an alternative, humanist form of religion, which would avoid the repressive and world-denying aspects of traditional religion, while preserving the values of spiritual community, ritual, and symbolism. However, he was just as passionate as a critic of morality. Duty, obligation, and even "universally human ideals" were all attacked by him as constraints upon the free individual. "Aesthetic amoralist"[40] was his self-given label, and he launched his attack from the standpoint of what he called the "aesthetics of life." He listed Nietzsche among such aestheticians of life — "the creators of ideals."[41] The rejection of duty and obligation, however, did not entail the individual's complacent contentment with the present state of affairs. It entailed self-discipline in pursuit of ideals, not the ones found "above," but the ones found "ahead": in the future of the *Übermensch*; that is, self-affirming, flourishing, endlessly flowing life. "We set no limits whatever to the will-to-power and love of the far-off, i.e., a striving to realize one's ideals in the broadest scope. … The more grandiose the scope, … the more self-sacrificingly the individual person consumes his energies in the name of his ideals — the better."[42]

Vladimir Bazarov is mostly remembered as an economist, for his role in the State Planning Commission, where, after 1922 he was partly responsible for many of the foundational elements of Soviet planning. Though an active Bolshevik early on, he left the party in 1908 and eventually came to oppose it; under Stalin, he came to be secretly tried and sentenced for alleged

subversive activities, and died in 1939, presumably in a forced labour camp. Insofar as the binary can be made, he was the most “collectivist” of the four Nietzscheans named here, but in a way entirely in line with Nietzsche’s spirit. His “collectivism” consisted in the “fusion of all human souls,”[43] which he envisioned as Dionysian in nature, prefigured by the intimacy of lovers; and its result would be the creation of an autonomous culture, driven by liberated creativity. Simultaneously, he pointed out that there is nothing substantially individualistic about bourgeois culture — in it, the autonomous individual is supreme only as a formality, but factually empty and impotent. He described his own ethics as “hedonistic amoralism” — a potentially misleading term, as he was insistent on differentiating his hedonism from any kind of utilitarian, passive contentment, or vain comfort, or the full elimination of hardship and pain. Likely drawing from Nietzsche, he made sure not to condemn suffering as such: “Socialism is higher than capitalism, not because it eliminates suffering, but because it eliminates the suffering which degrades.”[44] Whatever ethics he proposed, he did not propose a system of morality — any permanent abstract set of ideals independent from the lived experience of people and the culture that emerges, which he would reject as “metaphysical” and “authoritarian.” Like Nietzsche, he understood freedom as being *above* morality, supra-ethical. “Life, it may be, appears a hopelessly vulgar thing precisely because it is viewed through the dim glass of moral norms. … To seize life’s mystery, one must revolt against norms as such.”[45]

More could be listed, but we can already ask: “What will-to-power do these thinkers express in appropriating Nietzsche?” Clearly, they all had their individual particularities, varying interests and emphases, but what is it that distinguishes them from many other Russian Marxists of the time? There is, of course, the Nietzschean language, along with a common literary and stylistic talent, as well as a developed interest in areas that are sometimes neglected or dismissed by Marxists (especially Marxist

caricatures) — culture, aesthetics, and creativity, ethics and values, even epistemology, and each one repudiated abstract morals, duties and obligations. All of that is significant, but anyone can pay lip-service to Nietzschean terms in writing, including the Nazis. What matters is the stance they took up in life: they all, at different times, in various capacities, and to varying extents, took up positions of resistance.

Upon its establishment, the Soviet Republic was a relatively poor, relatively unindustrialized country, ravaged by the First World War and a civil war, and facing threats of military aggression from the most powerful countries in the world. It was clear that such danger and instability were not conditions for the establishment of socialism, and the Bolsheviks admitted this; they intended to maintain the republic until revolution in Europe succeeded, and the conditions for socialism in Russia could be met through international support. The Soviet Republic was flawed from the start, and these flaws were not reducible to material circumstances, but matters of party organization, too; nevertheless, the least one can say is that it *was* a force for world revolution in its early years, as it sent financial and military aid to the various revolutionary socialists of Europe, kindling the revolutionary wave. But the German revolution failed, and the Soviet Republic ended up weak, isolated, and desperate. The bureaucracy, which was a growing threat to the proletariat from the beginning, along with militarization, increasingly moved the Soviet Republic away from socialism. The Civil War had cost the Bolsheviks almost their entire working-class base, as by 1921, most industrial workers had either left to fight in the Red Army or to return to the land. This even led Lenin to say: “We are the representatives of a class which has ceased to exist.”[46] He himself came to admit the growing dominance of the Soviet bureaucracy:

> If we take Moscow with its 4,700 Communists in responsible positions, and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much

whether it can truthfully be said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth they are not directing, they are being directed.[47]

The degeneration of workers' power solidified with the rise of Stalin, who gave up the internationalist Marxist project in favour of national state-building, abandoning the last glimmer of hope the Soviet regime had in furthering socialism.[*] This was a tragedy in the true sense of the word. The Soviet Republic, the first workers' state in history, was doomed to become the opposite of everything that the revolution had been fought for. Ironically, the proletarian revolution came to carry out precisely the functions that bourgeois revolutions had already carried out in Western Europe: industrialization, proletarianization, the expansion of capitalist social relations.

In this situation, even in the face of futility, the Nietzschean Marxists refused to resign to passive servitude: they struggled for autonomy from bourgeois society just as fiercely as they came to struggle for autonomy from the growing party bureaucracy. As the Soviet Republic began degenerating, they were the ones who continued to expect more, who *still* saw an ideal ahead. Even as their struggle in the end proved futile in the face of Stalinism, they kept *pushing on*, in whatever ways their positions made possible. Bogdanov always upheld his right to critique, criticizing the New Economic Policy, and even arguing that the new emerging Soviet regime was expressing the interests of technocrats and bureaucrats, and for this he faced arrest, his file being kept open until after his death. Under Stalin's rule, Lunacharsky's name was erased from the Communist Party's history, and his memoirs banned. Of course, it was Volski and Bazarov who had to pay most dearly for their oppositional stance. It is significant that they did not stop at their struggle *against* all regimes and institutions that tended towards the life-denying and the anti-human. They also engaged in active *value-positing*, refusing to accept received Russian tradition, nationalism, capitalism, orthodox religion, or the liberal theory established

in the West, but *also* refusing to accept much of the Marxist orthodoxy, the emerging party dogma, or its newly enforced cultural norms. They never ceased to look ahead, to continue traversing the tightrope.

7

Given Nietzsche's popularity on the left prior to the 1930s, one must ask how Nietzsche was transformed into a Nazi hero, and even a legitimator of the Nazi regime. It is unavoidable to start with the well-known story of his sister, Elisabeth, who exerted her possessive will-to-power over Nietzsche even while he was still alive, intervening in his early attempts to marry, and purposefully sullying his friendship with Paul Rée and Lou Salomé. In 1885, Elisabeth married Bernhard Förster: a far-right, anti-Semitic German nationalist, whose goal was the establishment of a "pure Aryan settlement." Not only did Nietzsche refuse to go to their wedding, he eventually came to disown his sister because of it. Despite this, Elisabeth gained possession of the Nietzsche archives after his death. Later, she came to support the Nazi party, met Hitler in person, and even became a maternal figure of sorts to the Third Reich, such that even Hitler attended her funeral.

Elisabeth's instinct to possess was given great power with access and rights to the Nietzsche archive. She was able to mould Nietzsche publications, present herself as his closest acquaintance and confidant, and put forth her own interpretation of both Nietzsche the person and his works. She used this to extend her political influence, even fabricating letters, to appeal to political figures on the German right, such as a fake letter in which Nietzsche praises the German Kaiser.

The Will to Power, the book, is Förster's creation, put together out of unpublished fragments from Nietzsche's notebooks, many of which were merely preparations for more in-depth sections. Although Nietzsche had planned to write a great book under the title of *The Will to Power*, he gave this project up before his final breakdown, and even if he hadn't, it is highly

unlikely that the selection and order of the fragments used in it would correspond to what his sister had produced. For a long time, readers didn't know this, and believed it to be what Elisabeth claimed it to be — Nietzsche's magnum opus. Heidegger (incidentally another Nazi party member who had access to the Nietzsche archive) took *The Will to Power* to be Nietzsche's most important work. It wasn't until the socialist Italian Nietzsche scholar Mazzino Montinari laboriously examined Nietzsche's archives that it was discovered to what extent Nietzsche's fragments were chosen selectively, revised, recombined, and taken out of context in making up the work, even leading Montinari to proclaim, as the title of one of his books, *The Will to Power Does Not Exist*.

Elisabeth's efforts, though absolutely essential, were not yet enough to nazify Nietzsche. The aforementioned work by Thomas Mann played an essential role in popularizing him as an essentially Germanic figure (who himself was prefigured by Ernst Bertram's *Nietzsche: Attempt at Mythology*, which ridiculously presented a mythologized Nietzsche as a Germanic prophet). This was a process furthered and completed by officials in the Third Reich: Nietzsche was presented as a straightforward continuation of Germany's intellectual tradition starting with German Romanticism, all the way up to Wagner and Nazism. Nietzsche was placed in this lineage, and therefore posited as one of the prophets of Germany's national destiny. But before the Nazis' rise to power, it was with the First World War that the right-wing appropriations of Nietzsche truly took off. Specially durable copies of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* were even distributed to German troops, and Nietzsche's metaphoric references to "war" were taken as justifications of militarism. Nietzsche in fact hated militarism, especially the German variety, as he suffered some of the most traumatic years of his life in service as a war medic, and lost some of his closest friends to it — in several places, he even anticipated a future of world peace.

Making Nietzsche appear as continuous with Germany's "national destiny" meant making him continuous with Richard Wagner. Therefore, Alfred Baeumler, one of the most important Nazi popularizers of Nietzsche, discounted the entire middle period of Nietzsche's corpus, which made most explicit his break with Schopenhauer and Wagner, as well as Nietzsche's two anti-Wagner polemics of 1888 (*The Case of Wagner* and *Nietzsche contra Wagner*). Unsurprisingly, what was instead posited as Nietzsche's magnum opus was *The Will to Power*. Baeumler argued that many of Nietzsche's published books made it "difficult … to see the unity of the life's work," and that it was only *The Will to Power*, which was not even put together by Nietzsche, that revealed "the fundamental results"[48] and unity of his thought. By pretending that Nietzsche never broke away from the metaphysical framework of his first book *The Birth of Tragedy*, Baeumler tried to distance Nietzsche from the historical attitude that characterized his mature thought. He understood myth, for instance, in an entirely *anti-Nietzschean* manner, not as a historical phenomenon but an "intuitive prehistoric construct with an eternal, all-inclusive, inexhaustible content." Baeumler's reading then went on to fully reject Nietzsche's concepts of the eternal return and the Dionysian — precisely those concepts that Nietzsche considered to be the most essential to life-affirmation until the end of his life. It is not surprising that Baeumler feared the Dionysian ideal, which consists in radical, transformative ecstasy, in which the individual breaks down previously established boundaries. "The affirmation of transience *and destruction*" was for Nietzsche "the decisive feature of any Dionysian philosophy,"[49] and this feature was contrary to Baeumler's monolithic statism. After his breakdown, Nietzsche wrote in a letter that he is having all anti-Semites shot, and signed the letter off as Dionysus[50] — it makes sense then that Baeumler had no intention of befriending this Greek God.

One of Nietzsche's main popularizers among the general public was Heinrich Härtle, who wrote *Nietzsche and National Socialism*, presenting Nietzsche as an ally to the Nazis. He correctly pointed out as (from his standpoint) "flaws" in Nietzsche's thought, his individualism, his hostility to the state, and his hope for a cosmopolitan Europe; and in assessing Nietzsche's approach to history, he wrote "Something is lacking here, which for us is central: race."[51] He didn't seem to realize that "race" is not just lacking in Nietzsche's historical approach, to centre race would be contrary to the central point of Nietzsche's genealogical method. Racialized historicism is a case of "tracing a pedigree," as Raymond Geuss called it — the precise *opposite* of a genealogy. It tries to prove the value of something (in this case, the modern-day Germans, particularly those with blue eyes and blond hair) by tracing it back through an unbroken hereditary line to a point of origin (the original Proto-Aryans who supposedly lived on the North German Plain). Every aspect of this contradicts Nietzsche's genealogical method; genealogy denies that such unbroken hereditary lines exist in history, which is always characterized by ruptures, breaks, and leaps; it denies that such absolute points of origin exist, that instead, historically developed phenomena emerge as combinations of disparate developments, and therefore always have multiple origins; and finally, it denies that one can prove the absolute value of an entity by tracing its historical development, as the values, functions and purposes of historical entities always shift and transform. By pointing out that Nietzsche's historical approach lacks race, which for the Nazis is "central," Härtle unwittingly hinted towards a point of absolute incompatibility between Nazi doctrine and Nietzsche's historical method.

8

In the Soviet Union, Nietzsche's works were banned in 1923, by which point the regime had completely lost its revolutionary character, and by the

1930s Soviet philosophers had uncritically accepted the fascist interpretation of Nietzsche. It was a win-win situation for both regimes: Nazi Germany completely neutralized Nietzsche's radical and transformative potential, and the Soviet Union, which itself had become entirely life-denying, was able to denounce Nietzsche as a philosopher of fascism. The model Soviet interpretation of Nietzsche was set by B.M. Bernadiner, who bizarrely interpreted the will-to-power as expressing the German and Italian fascists' drive to imperialist domination, and read Nietzsche as being opposed to individual liberty. Such views were backed up by reference to Nazi appropriations of Nietzsche, but the dishonesty was made clear by the fact that Soviet anti-Nietzscheans nevertheless defended other classical German thinkers from Nazi appropriation, including even Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who the Nazi party cited as a central influence, and who, unlike Nietzsche, had been a fierce German nationalist and anti-Semite.

9

The consequences of the Nazi appropriation of Nietzsche are still visible today, as so many white supremacists and nationalists today claim Nietzsche for themselves. Richard Spencer, for instance, once said that he was "red-pilled by Nietzsche."[52] Although today's fascists have friends in high places, a big chunk of the movement's youth experience, like most people, a loss of identity, an absence of guiding values, and a growing sense of social worthlessness and impotence. Nietzsche's works address precisely such issues, and his powerful language often serves as even compensation and reassurance. Today's right-wing youth are often driven by a kind of grotesque and twisted "materialism" — the body is what is most real, what matters, and through social conditioning they learn to identify the body primarily with those features that have been racialized.

With contemporary associations in hand, Nietzsche's talk of the "master race," the "blond beasts of prey" should certainly sound an alarm, and Nietzsche is at fault for not choosing his language more carefully, at his own expense. But the "blondeness" of these "beasts of prey" did not refer to humans with blond hair, as the Nazis came to interpret it. It is a reference to the blond locks of the lion, which is made clear by the language of "prowling round" and the "wilderness"[53] — hence, in another part of the book he refers to the Homeric Greeks as "lion-hearted,"[54] and a poem in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* likewise refers to the "blond-locked Lion monster."[55] The racial interpretation would not even make sense, as on the same page, as examples of these "blond" beasts of prey, Nietzsche gives, among others, Arabian and Japanese nobles.

But pointing that out does not go far enough. We must see that Nietzsche distanced himself from racial thinking *as such*, especially as soon as he saw the forms it was taking in Germany: he proclaimed it as a maxim "to have intercourse with nobody who has any share in the mendacious race swindle."[56] In one thrust, he rejected both nationalism and racism when he said that "[w]e who are homeless are too manifold and mixed racially in our descent, being 'modern men,' and consequently do not feel tempted to participate in the mendacious racial self-admiration and racial indecency that parades in Germany today."[57] And it's not just the racist views of his time that he came to reject. He *actively* went against ideals of racial purity or national isolation, because "[w]here races are mixed, there is the source of great cultures."[58] The obsession with "purity," as revealed in analysis in *The Genealogy of Morality*, tends after all to be just an expression of the foremost *priestly ideal*.

Marx, by correctly identifying the basic mechanisms of capital, had in 1848 already predicted globalization and the corresponding decline of the significance of nations: "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must

nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere. / The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. … It has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood."[59] "Modern industry" thus strips the worker "of every trace of national character."[60] What was a shocking statement back in 1848 seems obvious to us now because Marx was correct, and we have lived through it. The twentieth century was the century of the nation-state — fascism, Stalinism, social democracy; but capital is insatiable, and the nation had to give way to multinational capital, neoliberalism. Conservatives still find it difficult to apprehend the most basic social facts of our time — they blame socialists for the decline of the nation and the family, both of which are constantly and increasingly undermined by capitalism, even as it simultaneously relies on them. Fascism is always backward-looking: in its heyday, it consisted in nostalgia for a pre-Modern, rural national culture. Today, fascism is reborn as nostalgia for the twentieth-century nation-state: workers embrace it because they blame their worsening social conditions on immigrants, the petty-bourgeoisie embrace it because multinational capital threatens all small businesses, and certain politicians embrace it because their sphere of rule is made increasingly less significant.

Nietzsche also anticipated the decline of nationalism, but in a very different, personal manner, through his own peculiar lived circumstances. When he first arrived in Switzerland for his professorship, Nietzsche gave up his Prussian nationality, as required by the university so as to be exempt from military conscription. At the same time, he hadn't acquired Swiss nationality yet, and never did. He thus lived through most of his life being *legally nationless*. This loss of nationality was like the official christening of a sense of world-citizenry that Nietzsche began feeling from very early on, a kind of global self-image that would only grow stronger with time. As early as 1873, Nietzsche said in a note that "cosmopolitanism must spread

out. The arbitrary boundaries of the nation state gradually lose their mystery and appear, much more, as terrible and bad."[61] In the later part of his life, Nietzsche effectively became a European nomad, never settling in any country for too long, usually alternating between the Swiss Alps, Venice, Italy, and France. National boundaries might as well not have existed in his lifestyle, and he would have preferred it if they didn't! Thus, in *Beyond Good and Evil* he anticipated and welcomed "the process of increasing similarity between Europeans … their increasing independence from that determinate milieu where for centuries the same demands would be inscribed on the soul and the body — and so the slow approach of an essentially supra-national and nomadic type of person."[62] This sentiment persisted until the end of his life — in *Ecce Homo*, the last book he wrote,[*] he labelled nationalism a "*névrose nationale* [national neurosis]," "the most anti-cultural sickness and unreason there is,"[63] and he envisioned its dissolution in a "war of spirits" wherein "all power structures from the old society will have exploded — they are all based on lies."[64] In a late letter to Georg Brandes, Nietzsche even envisions world peace, writing that "[i]f we win … we [will] have overcome the absurd boundaries between race, nation, and class; only an order of rank between man and man will remain."[65] Perhaps one should take this letter with a grain of salt, given that it was written during a period of delirium, but it has precedent in his earlier writings, and, if accurately reflecting Nietzsche's views, puts to rest the idea that the "order of rank" Nietzsche often speaks of is one determined by birth.

And we have not even mentioned his intense hatred of anti-Semitism — his strongest, most persistent hatred. Not only did Nietzsche despise anti-Semites, he actively took the side of Jewish people, praising them for their contribution to European culture, and said that it would be "practical and appropriate to throw the anti-Semitic hooligans out of the country."[66] When the anti-Semite Theodor Fritsch, who enjoyed Nietzsche's works, sent him

his writings, Nietzsche responded asking him “in the future not to provide me with these [anti-Semitic] mailings: I fear, in the end, for my patience” — “these constant, absurd falsifications and rationalizations of vague concepts ‘Germanic,’ ‘Semitic,’ ‘Aryan,’ ‘Christian,’ ‘German’ — all of that could in the long run cause me to lose my temper” — “how do you think I feel when the name Zarathustra is mouthed by anti-Semites?”[67] Perhaps it is partly in reference to anti-Semitic falsifications, or in anticipation of them, that Zarathustra said: “My enemies have become powerful and have distorted the image of my teaching.”[68]

When Nietzsche lost patience with his sister due to her marrying a fierce anti-Semite, he wrote to her in an impassioned letter:

> Have you grasped nothing of the reason why I am in the world? […] Now it has gone so far that I have to defend myself hand and foot against people who confuse me with these *anti-Semitic canaille*; […] After I read the name Zarathustra in the anti-Semitic Correspondence my forbearance came to an end. I am now in a position of emergency defense against your spouse’s Party. These accursed anti-Semite deformities shall not sully my ideal!![69]

Resistance against anti-Semitism was not just a personal quirk of Nietzsche’s — it was essential to his philosophy. As a critic of modernity in a sense similar to Marx, Nietzsche identifies a comprehensive social condition, whereby the ascetic ideal exerts its force in a manner that is independent of the conscious intentions of any particular individual or group of individuals. To attribute modernity’s ill to any particular group, especially a racially defined one, is to abandon Nietzsche and Marx, and any respectable modern social theory for that matter. It entails distorting the theory, and most of all, denying responsibility — not *moral* responsibility, guilt, but the recognition of how one’s own agency is implicated, even if unconsciously and unwillingly, in the social condition of nihilism, and how it may be changed. Not only does such distortion make the theory impossible to understand, it makes it impossible to act in accordance with it. This is the case with Marx, because to target particular racial or national

groups, even if particular groups of capitalists, means to miss the actual target — capital. Likewise, with Nietzsche, to act as if nihilism is concentrated in a particular, limited group of individuals, is to miss not just how widespread nihilism is, but its very nature. One then misses the target, and even perpetuates it: working-class anti-Semites become fuelled by their moralizing or resentment towards the Jews; simultaneously, they repress their drives, both because their nationalist and traditionalist values demand ascetic measures, and because they must happily submit to exploitation by their own national bourgeoisie. Giving up all organized autonomy, even independent unions, they become lapdogs at the mercy of their state and industry; their conditions of life open to being taken away at any moment, leaving them to beg. All the elements of the ascetic ideal are on display in full force here.

What's ridiculous above all is when right-wingers believe they are backed up by Nietzsche in defending "Western culture." They haven't even realized that Nietzsche is its harshest critic — this culture *is* nihilism!

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* The left-wing Hegelians emphasized the first half, interpreting it to mean that whatever is rational *will* become actual, thus making possible a future-oriented Hegelianism.

* The twentieth-century anarchist movement had a wealth of Nietzscheans, such as Emma Goldman, who held lectures on him and gave him the title of "honorary anarchist," German anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker, and certain members of the Spanish CNT-FAI, such as Salvador Seguí and Federica Montseny.

* Stalin's idea of "socialism in one country" was a nonsensical and anti-Marxist one. Capitalism is a world-system, and Marx and Engels always emphasized that its abolition could only be an international event. "Will it be possible for this revolution to take place in one country alone? / No. By creating the world market, big industry has already brought all the peoples of the Earth … into such close relation with one another that none is independent of what happens to the others. … It follows that the communist revolution will not merely be a national phenomenon but must take place simultaneously in all civilized countries … It is a universal revolution and will, accordingly, have a universal range." — Engels, *Principles of Communism*, #19.

* With the exception of *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, which is strictly speaking an essay.

V: Affirming Life

The Division of Labour

1

"An adult cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does the naivete of the child not give him pleasure, and does not he himself endeavour to reproduce the child's veracity on a higher level?"[1] So wrote Marx in reference to Ancient Greek culture, which he saw as "the historical childhood of humanity." Nietzsche expressed the same *Aufhebung* of childhood when he wrote that "[H]uman maturity" means "rediscovering the seriousness we had towards play when we were children."[2] If Ancient Greek culture is our childhood, and so is to be reproduced at a higher level, it makes sense that both Marx and Nietzsche looked back to the Ancient Greek ideal of *paideia* as something to be realized in the future. This was the ideal of a fully developed, well-rounded, and harmonious individual, developed and empowered in all spheres, in theory as in practice, in culture and in art.

It was this ideal that Marx was evoking when he spoke of socialism as making possible the "*rich human being*," who is "in need of a totality of human manifestations of life … in whom his own realisation exists as an inner necessity"[3] — the "rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption."[4] Marx wanted a world which makes time "for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilment of social functions, for social intercourse, for the free play of the vital forces of [one's] body and [one's] mind."[5] And it was this same ideal that Nietzsche referred to when he described Goethe, his prime example of a great human being, in *Twilight of the Idols*: "What he wanted was *totality*; he fought

against the separation of reason, sensibility, feeling, will … he disciplined himself to wholeness, he created himself … Goethe conceived of a strong, highly educated, self-respecting human being, skilled in all things physical and able to keep himself in check, who could dare to allow himself the entire expanse and wealth of naturalness."[6]

It is with this ideal in mind that one should read Trotsky's claim that under communism, "[t]he average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise."[7] Such an assertion might seem exaggerated, but it becomes more plausible if we read it in terms of the realization of *paideia*. Aristotle and Goethe are precisely examples of individuals who approached this ideal, who developed in several directions, who sought out a wealth of powers and capacities, and strived towards wholeness and totality.

Modernity has been characterized by the loss of this ideal, by the *fragmentation* of human beings. As Zarathustra says:

> Truly my friends, I walk among human beings as among the fragments and limbs of human beings!
>
> This is what is most frightening to my eyes, that I find mankind in ruins and scattered about as if on a battle field or a butcher field.
>
> And if my gaze flees from the now to the past; it always finds the same: fragments and limbs and grisly accidents — but no human beings![8]

2

But why is this ideal so distant to us today? The answer is simple: the capitalist division of labour. Being exempt from it is precisely what made the Ancient Greek aristocracy capable of upholding such a bold ideal. How, after all, could an individual ever achieve such wholeness, totality, expansion in the narrow constraint that modern wage labour forces people into? Nietzsche, reflecting on his early work *Untimely Meditations* in his autobiographical *Ecce Homo*, says that the book "highlights what is dangerous about our kind of scientific endeavour, what there is in it that

gnaws away at life and poisons it — life made *ill* by this dehumanized machinery and mechanism, by the '*im*personality' of the worker, by the false economy of the 'division of labour'. The *end,* culture, is lost—the means, modern scientific endeavour, barbarizes…"[9]

Today, this "false economy of the 'division of labour'" restricts the majority of the population to the dehumanizing repetition of a single, limited task — it is as if whatever limbs and appendages do not contribute to the task at hand might as well be amputated. Marx puts it well when he says that it "converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts … The individual himself is made the automatic motor of a fractional operation,"[10] with Engels adding that "[t]he machinery of modern industry degrades the labourer from a machine to the mere appendage of a machine."[11]

Lest the nineteenth-century context of industrial factory work makes these quotes seem obsolete, let us not assume that such deformation is avoided by the contemporary service worker. A grotesque but illuminating example is provided by the so-called "smile mask syndrome," a psychological disorder that was proposed by Japanese psychiatrist Makoto Natsume when he found that certain service workers had to fake a smile for such extended periods of time that they would involuntarily smile even in stressful or upsetting situations. We see here a psychological phenomenon as insidious and self-destructive as that burrowing worm of the ascetic ideal. When capital had enclosed and colonized the body, it could only continue by colonizing the soul, already made susceptible and pliable by centuries of nihilistic psychology. The capacity to smile is forced at the expense of a fully developed emotional life — we are very far here from the realization of *paideia*.

The majority of the world's population, for the majority of their waking lives, live in the grip of this spectral cage, whose haunting extends into

every crevice of life. If this monstrous mechanism was successfully obliterated, it is difficult for us to even *imagine* the heights that human creativity could then reach, with the mass of the people finally being able to pursue and develop their manifold interests and capabilities — an explosion of multifaceted activity united globally — Nietzsche's social ideal of "unity in multiplicity."[12]

3

Nietzsche's *revulsion* at the capitalist division of labour was consistent — he did not believe that anything great could arise in its claws. Perhaps one of the reasons he never turned to socialism despite this was because so many of the forms of socialism he was familiar with in his time were not radical enough to attack the division of labour itself. In any case, Nietzsche did not think that such a possibility existed for the mass of the people — his glance was still too limited by the past. He would look to the great historical figures of the past and see how they always stood atop a mountain of toil and misery from which they were personally exempt, and would conclude therefrom that there is no other way for a great human being to exist — Nietzsche's anti-capitalism was therefore aristocratic. Today, there is no excuse. Not only has capital eradicated every last enclave of any kind of pre-capitalism, including any kind of aristocracy, it has also accelerated the productive forces to the point of global overproduction, of being able to fulfil the essential needs of every human being on Earth and more.

To his credit, in a notebook from 1877, Nietzsche did make the caveat that there would always have to be a class of people doing the hard and rough work "so long as they cannot be relieved of it by machines."[13] So the tendency towards automation is acknowledged, but this isn't enough. The bourgeoisie have been perfectly comfortable in acknowledging this tendency decade after decade, each time promising anew a coming age of full automation and leisure. Here we have a clever re-imagining of heaven

as promised for the masses: “if you just wait long enough, in obedience and passivity, you’ll arrive in paradise soon enough!”

In a century, automation has already surpassed all previous expectations in productivity, but the opportunities it affords, if not actively seized by a revolutionary class, will continue generating misery. The working class has barely seen a crumb of the wealth generated by the skyrocketing productivity of its own labour, while millions are either automated out of their livelihood or live in fear of this occurring. Finally, capital showcases its endless creativity in dehumanizing and humiliating human life by saving people from leisure through the invention of more and more useless jobs. It brings to mind what was the most unintentionally astounding display of American capitalist ideology that I happened to see in Florida on my first visit: one of the first sights I noticed on the drive away from the airport was a Black woman standing on the side of the road, under direct sunlight during the hottest part of the day, with no shade in sight, dressed for work as the Statue of Liberty — representing liberty as a job requirement, just as demanded of her, in an outfit made from material as cheap as it is thick, probably produced in a sweatshop. She stood there holding a sign, advertising a tax company. It is as if every detail of the job description was calculated to be as dehumanizing as banal — intensely unpleasant but nevertheless tedious, physically exhausting but unrewarding, public but completely unfulfilling and forgettable. Every positive was eliminated as if with a checklist, like the fresh air that might have otherwise been enjoyed in an outdoor job being filled with gas and dust blowing off the road. And the loneliness, both the loneliness produced by the distance of all the people encased in their vehicles, and the loneliness produced by being the only person dressed as the Statue of Liberty, is something even the worker under nineteenth-century factory discipline didn’t have to endure.

If I had seen this image in a film of social-political commentary, I would have deemed it ham-fisted and exaggerated, but it was a relatively

mundane sight in Florida. It perfectly encapsulated the banal horror of twenty-first-century working life. In the first place, US tax companies only exist in such proliferation due to their active opposition to making tax forms more accessible, as they actively maintain the *difficulty* of tax preparation. Contrary to the capitalist dogma that profits are derived from providing utility, here is a business that profits precisely through making life slightly more inconvenient.

This company, completely useless outside of capital accumulation, which could on its own serve as a condemnation of the absurdity of the logic of capital, then hires human beings only to reduce them to living signposts, signposts sweating under scorching heat, signposts breathing in car exhaust. Then, as if the humiliation involved was not already sufficient, they are dressed up as the Statue of Liberty — a choice of outfit parodic and farcical to the point of cruelty. It is almost as if capital itself is mocking humanity through this spectacle, taunting us, showing us how it has transfigured liberty into something dehumanizing. This kind of job exemplifies perfectly how the capitalist division of labour removes all empowering and life-affirming elements from the process of satisfying one's needs.

4

Nietzsche's critique of modern society as one incapable of social critique is inherently linked to his critique of the reduction of people to tools or instruments. A well-functioning tool is one which consistently maintains the same functions and, in that respect, undergoes no changes. A tool that would suddenly change the function it performs would be an unreliable and therefore deficient one. When a society reduces the mass of the population to tools, a direct outcome of this is that they must be reduced to a small number of functions, which never change or admit of unpredictability and spontaneity — such that workers would be reliable to their employers.

Workers are thus actively inculcated with the *in*capacity to spontaneously change their functions, redirect their activities, or set new goals. If such stagnation is encouraged in the majority of the populace, society itself cannot but stagnate.

5

One shouldn't idealize Ancient Greek society, however. Given their low level of technical development, the ideal of the well-rounded individual was made possible only by the condemnation of a large section of the populace to slavery, to whom the ideal of *paideia* was explicitly denied. Indeed, all past class societies were ones in which "free time on one side correspond[ed] to subjugated time on the other side."[14] *Paideia* was formulated by the exploiting class, not the exploited, and its modern-day realization could not be a straightforward replication, as it would be signalled by the *end* of exploitation. Aristotle viewed manual labour as banal and harmful to the human being, a view which was unsurprisingly common in Ancient Greece — this was a society in which only those exempt from manual labour could even *consider* approaching something like *paideia*. But the technical developments of modernity have greatly surpassed anything a slave society could ever produce. Our staggering levels of productivity, along with the immense body of knowledge so easily stored, accessed, and communicated across the globe, have made the ideal of all-round human development a universal possibility — even among today's working class, these developments have in some cases produced moments of newfound joy.

Full human development today would not be the simple return of *paideia*, but its *Aufhebung*, just as mature adulthood is the *Aufhebung* of childhood. It would be an ideal of human development formulated by the mass of society rather than a select few, an expression of human creativity unburdened by the arbitrariness of ascribed status.[*] It would be unafraid

even of manual labour, which, rather than making human development impossible, would only enrich it and create new avenues for self-expression, and it would make full use of the immense productive forces made available. This is the height towards which our ambitions should aim, but to maintain such ambition, we must maintain the possibility of controlling the machinery which today dominates over us.

Along with immense increases in productivity, capitalism has simultaneously produced obscene spectacles of waste and destruction — to keep prices high, always in submission to the demands of capital, mass farms destroy entire fields of vegetables and pour away millions of gallons of milk per day, while Amazon warehouses contain designated areas for the destruction of unbought goods. Not to mention the amount of unbought goods thrown away, destroyed, or wasted by grocery stores and malls, or the amount wasted by inefficient transportation. The destructive tendencies of capital have been evident since the very beginning of industry, and they have only become more and more glaringly obvious since. The massive increase in waste caused by the COVID pandemic shows that it is capital, not human beings, that manage our resources. Three simultaneous tendencies in particular are clear: 1) productivity under capitalism has already surpassed the needs of the global population and keeps rising as dictated by the motions of capital, this corresponds to 2) a constant increase in the amount of products destroyed or wasted, including everything from food and clothes to consumer goods to expensive brands, which happens alongside 3) persistent global starvation, malnourishment, and poverty.

What this means is that capitalism is incapable of making use of the very wealth it creates for the fulfilment of needs. It is no longer necessary; its destruction is necessary. The division of labour could be abolished not just for a small minority standing on the backs of slaves, but abolished *tout court* — guillotined. In Marx, the notion of *paideia*, full human development, becomes not just an ideal to fantasize about, but a process

made concretely possible, and even *necessary*, by existing material relations:

> Modern industry, indeed, compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail-worker of today, grappled by life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to the mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs, are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers.[15]

This does not mean the absurd idea that people would no longer be assigned tasks — what it means is that they will not be limited to those tasks through economic and political coercion, nor defined by them, just as a family member can be asked to clean the bathroom without thereby receiving the title of janitor. Society could be organized such that the rotation of tasks makes possible varied forms of activity, where an individual can work in construction one day and design or architecture another, garden in the morning and teach in the afternoon; where manual labour and mental labour are not strictly separated; where individuals can therefore develop their powers in several directions, and rather than functioning as fragments, empower themselves in their *totality*. This would be a society that has “no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities.”[16] Where “the development of all human powers” would be “as such the end in itself.”[17]

6

The global capitalist order produces copious amounts of misery, and I have touched on many of its aspects, but it would be dishonest to deny that there is also a certain kind of *joy* particular to the capitalist system. There is, first of all, the joy in the accelerating growth of the forces of production. The internet and free software arm even working-class individuals, despite limited resources and limited free time, with certain capacities that would

have been unimaginable in any previously existing society. There is an *ecstatic rush* that these capacities are capable of producing. There is, furthermore, in the perception of unfathomably accelerating technological development, the possibility of a kind of *technological sublime*, which fills one simultaneously with wonder and horror as one witnesses an extreme power that is produced by humans yet appears also incalculably *greater* than humanity.

There is also a joy that can be found in certain instances of capitalism's destructive drive, the joy of *negation*. Capitalism contains a revolutionizing tendency that puts into question any kind of social permanence, and it can produce, however deformed, a certain sensation of freedom — freedom from traditional and outdated social forms that seemed oppressive in their stubborn stability, and have been rapidly mowed down by capitalist development. Such destruction can produce a feeling of a clean slate being opened up, of new horizons emerging.

Certain pro-capitalist theorists, especially of the right-accelerationist variety, have appealed to these aspects of capitalism in order to justify it and portray it as appealing. Capitalism's ecstatic rush, its technological sublime, its reckless destructive impulse — to focus only on these aspects leads to a one-sided perception of capitalism, but it is precisely by focusing on this limited side that many people have come to find capitalism appealing, despite being its victims in many other ways.

While the right-accelerationists appeal to what has been *gained* in capitalism, traditionalist reactionaries gain their authority by appealing to what has been *lost*. Capitalism has destroyed long-lasting communal ties, social stability, shared and firmly established cultural forms, and an assured sense of existential meaning. These too have been undeniable sources of happiness in pre-modern life — reactionaries undoubtedly point out something true when they emphasize these losses, but like the right-accelerationists, they are presenting a one-sided view of capitalism. In their

one-sidedness, the reactionaries have produced a narrative of a return to a previously existing “Garden of Eden” — in this, they present themselves as the representatives of pre-modernity, but their form of reactionary politics is something birthed by modernity itself, and entirely specific to it.

Capitalism is an immensely paradoxical and multifaceted system. Most ideologies, both in favour of capitalism and against it, function by emphasizing only one of its aspects, and downplaying all others. The only way to properly perceive capitalism, then, and to avoid being misled about its true nature, is to view it from an all-sided dialectical perspective: as both progress and regress at once. Only then can we understand why a return to pre-capitalism is both impossible and undesirable, but so is its indefinite continuation. We must unleash and develop the positive potentials it has produced, while reinventing the social necessities it has destroyed.

7

In a crucial passage in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels write that the division of labour “only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears”[18] and add that this concurs with the first form of ideologists: the priests.

It is important to note, in relation to this, that what Nietzsche calls the “slave revolt” in *The Genealogy of Morals* is not led by the slaves as such, but by a separate, priestly class, who Nietzsche describes as belonging to the masterly class, but nevertheless being characterized by slavish characteristics. The slave revolt involves the invention of a new type of worldview, a foundational and absolute framework, according to which the existing valuations of weakness and strength is reversed (the strong become sinful, the weak become virtuous), and the Earth is disparaged in favour of a world beyond the material and the sensual. It is easy to read *The Genealogy* as claiming that this framework is invented by the slaves, but as

R. Jay Wallace has pointed out,[19] this reading leads to a troublesome contradiction.

On the one hand, this new framework produced by the slave revolt is described as an act of *conscious* revenge, namely, revenge against the strong, powerful, and affirmative (Nietzsche describes it as being even "farsighted" and "calculated"[20]). At the same time, it is described as something that the slaves truly believe in, adopt and internalize — indeed, one of its most attractive features is that it helps them make sense of their own suffering. But it cannot be both: if the invention of the framework is a conscious act of revenge on the part of the slaves, how could they nevertheless genuinely believe it and internalize it in themselves? How could they devise a calculated instrument of revenge and simultaneously adopt it as their own sacred belief?

The conflict is solved, as indicated by Marx and Engels, by the division of labour. It is not the slaves, but the priests, exempt from practice and devoted entirely to mental labour, who invent the framework. The slaves would have neither the time nor the resources for such an invention due to their daily toil. Rather, the slaves step in when the priestly framework must be made effective, given force and material significance, as it is preached and spread among them (as Marx points out, theory becomes a material force when it grips the masses). In other words, it is the priests who invent, calculate, enact revenge, and the slaves who are indoctrinated into believing it and internalizing it.

Nietzsche describes the priests as having, despite their class position, slavish characteristics precisely on account of their being exempt from *real practice* — being "turned away from action,"[21] in contrast to those masters Nietzsche describes as knights and warriors. Exempt from the "dirty work," they are able to follow an ideal of cleanliness available neither to the masses nor the other ruling castes, consisting of regular washing, avoidance of certain foods, and a horror of blood — this is the origin of "purity" as a

moral value. Given the priests' passive character, they tend towards ascetic measures, such as fasting and sexual abstinence, which only deepens their slavish characteristics. The weakness this causes in the priests makes them resentful towards the stronger layers of the ruling class, but they cannot exact revenge directly precisely on account of this weakness — thus, the unfulfilled accumulation of resentment gives birth to a *new form* of revenge — a farsighted, calculated, *spiritual* revenge — much slower and much less certain, but more pervasive and insidious in its effects. In my native Lithuanian, the word for "worm" is also sometimes used to refer to the gnawing of conscience, and this is an appropriate visualization: the priestly form of revenge proceeds not by attacking from the outside, but by internalizing itself in its targets, like a worm burrowing into their souls, until it finally reaches the depths of conscience and enacts revenge from within, parasitically targeting the body. The priests then make this framework effective by infusing it into the masses, who accept it on account of its promises of heaven and the punishment of one's enemies, and its power in making sense of life and its suffering. The slave revolt is complete.

This reading is confirmed in the third essay of *The Genealogy*, in which Nietzsche says that "the priest is the *direction-changer of ressentiment*"[22] and in *The Antichrist*, where Nietzsche says that for the "priestly type, decadence is only a *means*."[23] Compensating for their own weaknesses, the priests gain immense power by coming to direct, manage and control a mass of slaves in their role as ideologists. The priests are the tacticians and strategists of the slave revolt, of asceticism and life-denial.

To return to *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels continue by saying that from the moment the division between manual and mental labour is carried through, "consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness

is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc."[24] Not only is this passage entirely in line with *The Genealogy*, it helps us make sense of it. Due to the division of labour, the priests' thinking becomes separated, to the extent that this is possible, from immediate practice, and can now take on the appearance of being independent of the material world as such, even beyond it — from this stems their life-denying character, their impulse to denigrate the world of practice, to disparage the senses, and to universalize. "[T] he whole metaphysics of the clergy," Nietzsche says, is "antagonistic towards the senses."[25] It is precisely because of the division between mental and manual labour that Western philosophy has tended to make such a strict separation between body and soul, and its denigration of the body was therefore simultaneously the denigration of manual labourers; this is what made it appear plausible to claim that history is moved by Ideas. Through the division of labour, the priest's real-life passivity and impotence is transformed, transvalued from a crippling weakness into a power so great that it claims to transcend the sensual, material world in favour of something higher and more valuable than it.

But not only do Marx and Engels help us make sense of the character of the priest, they produce an essential insight, one that Nietzsche himself did not recognize, or at least did not explicitly state. Namely, that the slave revolt, nihilism, life-denial, is inseparable from the establishment of the division of labour. Recognizing this is one of the main preconditions of a Nietzschean socialism.

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* Meaning social status that is assumed involuntarily, especially at birth, rather than chosen or earned.

Aesthetics

1

Before ever becoming interested in philosophy as such, Nietzsche's foremost interest was in music and poetry. Church music accounted for the most intense experiences of his childhood, and some of his earliest creations were sacred choral compositions.[1] Similarly, Marx, before ever becoming a Hegelian philosopher or a socialist revolutionary, sought to become a Romantic poet. Poetry remained his main concern even when he began studying law, and while studying in Berlin he sent three dedicated books of poetry to his life-long love Jenny, who, as Marx's sister recalled, "wept tears of delight and pain" upon receiving them.[2]

This common aesthetic background between the two thinkers is not accidental, nor were their artistic endeavours merely mistakes or false starts unrelated to their "true" calling in philosophy. Aesthetic sensibility was certainly important in allowing Nietzsche and Marx to write in a grand and soul-gripping way, but that is not its sole significance. It is almost as if, by nature, Marx and Nietzsche sought life's purpose in the aesthetic, pursuing it as life's most sacred and valuable component, but in reaching towards it, they found themselves obstructed at every step, and found the aesthetic itself constantly undermined, denigrated, and degraded. One could even argue that it wasn't aesthetic creativity that posed a false start in their careers, but, on the contrary, that *theory* was a detour taken by them when aesthetic fulfilment was obstructed.

Both of them found this obstruction in the same things: the industriousness and wealth that could seek nothing but its own expansion,

with life being degraded to a mere means subservient to endless productivity; religion used to denounce earthly life and its sensuous enjoyment, teaching the human being to be ashamed of oneself and one's body; and finally, the narrow and dehumanizing social limitations inherent in bourgeois society, which to a great extent made the aesthetic sense an extraneous factor in the lives of the great majority, and, in the minority, reduced it to yet another chore or pretence. Perhaps the aesthetic drive and its blockage was the starting point for Marx and Nietzsche's critique of modernity and their burning desire to transform it.

The need for aesthetic fulfilment is one of the main candidates in characterizing what is distinctively human, yet one that humanity, actively but unintentionally, has to a great degree sabotaged; the aesthetic could therefore plausibly be cited as a cause for the development of Marx's and Nietzsche's particular form of "humanism." Not an essentialist humanism, based on a pre-defined and stagnant definition of human nature, but one in which the social human being is characterized by the endless capacity for conscious self-transformation and self-fashioning.

The only problem with calling the mature philosophies and social aspirations of Marx and Nietzsche "detours" in this sense is the potential impression that these developments were not "necessary." They were absolutely necessary, serving as weapons against that which degrades the beauty of life, but weapons which, upon victory, would self-destruct. Once the food, the shelter, and warmth are procured and the enemy is eliminated, one then looks towards the aesthetic. As life begins and as life is ending, one's first and last concern is the aesthetic. Even after his breakdown, when Nietzsche was losing his ability to speak, playing the piano was one of the last things he was still capable of doing.

When Trotsky was writing his testament on 27 February 1940, the year he would die, he expressed in general terms a form of Nietzsche's eternal return, in which one's life must be re-lived exactly as it was: "If I had to

begin all over again … the main course of my life would remain unchanged."[3] This was a remarkable expression of life-affirmation for a person who was expelled, shunned, and hunted down in the name of the very revolution he had an active hand in leading, who for twenty years lived in exile, caught between the deadly fangs of the capitalists, the fascists, and the Stalinists, and at the time of writing suffered from a decline in health. It is hard to imagine how such affirmation would be possible without a sense of the aesthetic. And, indeed, Trotsky's letter ends not with a remark on Marxism or revolution, but with a tribute to the *beauty* of life. He describes his wife opening the window, revealing a bright green strip of grass outside, under sunlight and a clear blue sky, and the immense power of the aesthetic sense finds even in this simple sight of a patch of grass a cause for the affirmation of life: "Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence, and enjoy it to the full."[4]

2

Given that life is experienced through the senses, and the senses are given their most vital expression and space of play in art, a lot can be deduced about a philosopher from their views on art. After all, the word "aesthetics" is derived from the Greek αἰσθητικός (*aisthetikos*), meaning, among other things, "sensitive," "pertaining to sense perception," which gives the term an essential connection to sense-experience in general. Aesthetics can therefore refer not only to matters of art, but to the nature of sensory experience as such. This section concerns both of these aspects: the life of aesthetics and the aesthetics of life.

Plato disparaged the senses, deemed them misleading and their results illusory, and so he condemned visual art as a mere imitation of an imitation. Kant saw sense data (i.e., content) as requiring submission, constraint by the categories of reason (i.e., form) in order to be valid, and so his aesthetics concerned proper form. Nietzsche elevated sense experience

against all that had previously been used to undermine it, and so he elevated the aesthetic too. To him, the aesthetic became not only central to, but even essential to life. “[A]rt, as the *good* will to appearance.”[5] This shows that, in many cases, given someone’s views on aesthetics, the extent to which they affirm or deny it, one can then deduce how *life-affirming* or *life-denying* they are.

After all, if one denigrates the aesthetic, and by extension the senses as a whole, one must either reject life explicitly (e.g., Schopenhauer), or redeem it in a life-denying manner, such as by reference to some other-worldly, extra-sensory realm (e.g., Plato). Us Nietzscheans have abandoned all other-worlds, all “hinterworlds” as Zarathustra called them, and we can find no solace in them. All abstract, universalizing morals have also been rejected by us, and so we cannot justify life on a moral basis either. Nor can we do it in the name of some capital-T “Truth.” It is only aesthetic redemption that is open to us. We require a sphere which does not reject or seek to go beyond or behind the senses, but which *thrives* and *revels* in the senses, and transfigures, sublimates, even *deifies* them, because “only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*.”[6]

This shouldn’t, however, lead one to think that all circumstances are equally conducive to aesthetic affirmation. Fascism has often managed to advertise itself as the political standpoint of the aesthetic individual, and by aestheticizing politics, the nation, and even war, it sought to throw a decorative façade over all the material problems it was incapable of addressing — thus a false aesthetic ideal was used for political sedation.

> One could do us no greater injustice than to assume that for us it is a matter of art alone, as if it were to function as a medicine and narcotic with which we could cure ourselves of all other miserable conditions.
>
> — Nietzsche, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*[7]

To avoid this mistake, one must always recognize that the aesthetic sensibility is itself nothing supernatural, but something that develops on a

material basis, and is maintained, strengthened, or undermined by specific social relations. “Just as only music awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has *no* sense for the unmusical ear,” writes Marx “it can therefore only exist for me insofar as my essential power exists for itself as a subjective capacity; because the meaning of an object for me goes only so far as *my* sense goes … for this reason the senses of the social man *differ* from those of the non-social man.” In other words, affirming life aesthetically is possible only on the basis of my own essential aesthetic powers that are by no means guaranteed, but must be developed in society:

> Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man’s essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form — in short, senses capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of man) either cultivated or brought into being. … *human* sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of *its* object, by virtue of *humanized* nature. The forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present.
>
> — Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*[8]

The fact that Marx’s politics have an aesthetic dimension is made exceedingly clear here. David McLellan, among others, suggests that this dimension was influenced by the German Romantic Friedrich Schiller,[9] who believed that humankind’s propensity towards divinity can only be realized aesthetically. When the natural world is transformed by humans to express the totality of humanity’s being, it achieves a reconciliation between nature and spirit, content and form, the particular and the universal, and this divine reconciliation is apprehended by the human being aesthetically.

Not only did Marx and Nietzsche both emphasize the importance of aesthetic sensibility to the affirmation of life, they both understood that capitalism undermines this sensibility:

> The man engaged in commerce understands how to appraise everything without having made it, and to appraise it *according to the needs of the consumer*, not according to his own needs; "who and how many will consume this?" is his question of questions. This type of appraisal he then applies instinctively and all the time: he applies it to everything, and thus also to the productions of the arts and sciences, of thinkers, scholars, artists, statesmen, peoples and parties, of the entire age: in regard to everything that is made he inquires after supply and demand *in order to determine the value of a thing in his own eyes*.
>
> — Nietzsche, *Daybreak*[10]

> [T]he dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value but not the beauty and the specific character of the mineral: he has no mineralogical sense. Thus, the objectification of the human essence, both in its theoretical and practical aspects, is required to make man's sense *human*, as well as to create the *human sense* corresponding to the entire wealth of human and natural substance.
>
> — Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*[11]

These passages are, despite varying emphases, remarkably similar in their concern — they concern the manner in which capitalist social relations affect a human being's very senses, sensibility, the aesthetic sense. Peter Demetz once criticized Marx's materialism for robbing the artist of their freedom, and reducing them to a servant of economic processes, but it is not Marx that does this, it is capitalism! And it is to oppose this condition that Marx strove to reveal it. Under capitalism, all senses "caught up in crude practical need" have only "a *restricted sense*." It is not just the businessman whose senses are thus restricted. Marx adds that the desperate, poverty-stricken worker approaches food in the non-human manner of an unreflective drive to satiate hunger, and experiences not the "human form of food that exists, but only its abstract existence as food." Capitalism is the indefinite subordination of human beings to crude practical need, and thus fundamentally opposed to the elevation of the aesthetic senses, and if the aesthetic senses are essential to life-affirmation, it follows that capitalism is opposed to *life itself*.

The aesthetic justification of life isn't reducible to literal works of art — it would be a very limited redemption if it was. It is not just that works of art should affirm life, but life itself should be affirmed in the manner of a work of art. Nietzsche writes that "we should learn from artists while otherwise being wiser than they. For usually in their case this delicate [aesthetic] power stops where art ends and life begins; we, however, want to be poets of our lives, starting with the smallest and most commonplace details."[12] Viewed aesthetically, what is beautiful in our lives can be highlighted and made to radiate, and even the flaws and imperfections of our lives can be arranged in the context of the whole "work of art" so as to be affirmative to the maximum.

Aesthetics can only be fully affirmed if it expands to cover the whole world, and in the same process, effectively comes to be abolished, as it no longer exists as a distinct, limited sphere.[13] If aesthetics is essential to life-affirmation, then limitless life-affirmation entails limitless aesthetics. One refers to the same thing, whether one calls it the abolition of art as a distinct sphere, or the unification of art and life.

In some works, Nietzsche would equate his higher ideal of art with the festival: "What do all our art of artworks matter if we lose that higher art, the art of festivals! Formerly, all artworks were displayed on the great festival road of humanity, as commemorations and memorials of high and happy moments. Now one uses artworks to lure poor, exhausted, and sick human beings to the side of humanity's road of suffering for a short lascivious moment."[14] The festival, after all, is Dionysian: it consists in the collective and ecstatic destruction of bounds. In the festival, art refuses to be contained in museums and picture-frames, to be reduced to a passive object for disinterested observation. In the Dionysian state, "the entire system of affects is excited and intensified" and its essential element is "the ease of metamorphosis," in which the Dionysian individual "constantly transforms himself."[15] Dionysian art, therefore, is revolutionary — it

refuses to limit the affects which express themselves through it, and unleashes continuous transformation. This is why art's drive towards expansion expressed itself most powerfully throughout many of the revolutionary moments of the twentieth century.

Lunacharsky, the Nietzschean Bolshevik, proclaimed at the First Soviet Conference of the Departments of Art, that "[t]he Proletariat must finally eradicate the sharp difference between life and art which has concerned the ruling class of the past,"[16] and fellow Nietzschean Volski saw in socialism a world where creativity permeates the "prose and poetry of life."[17] Trotsky, in *Literature and Revolution*, described, even using the Russian word for *Übermensch*, the human being of the future aesthetically, "more harmonized … more rhythmic … more musical" — our social processes given "beautiful form" by the arts, and "all the vital elements of contemporary art [developed] to the highest point."[18] Alexander Rodchenko, the Soviet artist famous for his iconic constructivist works, declared that it is time "for art to be an organic part of life," listing the following slogans:

> The future is not going to build monasteries for priests or for the prophets and clowns of art.
> Down with art as a showy gem in the dark, grimy lives of the poor!
> Down with art as means of escape for a senseless life! The art of our age is conscious, organized life, capable of seeing and creating.
> The artist of our age is the man able to organize his life, his work and himself.
> One has to work for life, not for the palaces, churches, cemeteries and museums.[19]

The same drive famously expressed itself in France in the revolution of May 1968, often remembered for its emblematic slogans and posters. The École des Beaux-Arts, an influential Parisian art school, was occupied by students and teachers and turned into an autonomous art workshop, where revolutionary art would be collectively designed, printed, and then taped throughout the streets of Paris. "La beauté est dans larue [beauty is in the street]" said one poster. When police officers raided the school and forcibly

expelled the occupiers, one poster, in reference to this, depicted a cop biting down on a toothbrush, with the slogan: “The police show up at the Beaux-Arts, the Beaux-Arts displays in the street.”[20] The message is clear: You can expel us from our bounds of art, we will make art boundless.

Becoming

Why did Nietzsche associate Being with slave morality? Because the slavish are weak and impotent, incapable of facing up to the actual world of everyday experience — a world of constant flux and eternal change. They find this unpredictability and motion frightening, so they conjure up another realm — a realm of Being, opposed to the everyday world of Becoming. Whether this is the heaven of Plato's forms, the kingdom of God, or even the realm of scientific laws, it is an attempt to reduce and undermine the endless flux that characterizes our world, and deny this world in favour of an extra-sensory realm that provides one with the peace and security of stable Being. One could give as an example the bourgeoisie, who, afraid of revolutionary change, worried about losing their position in society, preach a realm of eternal, natural, inalienable rights, which throughout all real-life political and economic changes assure them that their entitlement to private property is God-given. A Dionysian proletariat would do well to remind them of Becoming. Today, only the revolutionary class can experience what is so dear for both Marx and Nietzsche — freedom not in Being, but freedom in *Becoming*. Freedom is not freedom to be what you already are, to be some predefined essence — that's the very opposite of freedom, as it forces you to fit a subjugating, pre-determined mould, whether it's sent down to you from Plato's heaven, or from some institution that would like you to be more predictable. When you are forced to be the representative of some national, cultural, social label, an identity, Being is imposed on you — all that confirms this identity is good, all that denies this identity is bad. "Do not transgress, lest you expose the arbitrariness of the Being that you eternally are!" you are told. Society, Nietzsche says, views its subjects only

as tools, instruments, and the mark of a good instrument is its lack of change, its predictability, its dedication to a single set of functions. But true freedom is freedom to *become*, to surpass oneself, to unleash powers one wasn't even aware of — to affirm life! It consists "in the absolute movement of becoming," as Marx put it.[1] Life itself said to Zarathustra: "Behold, I am that which must always overcome itself."[2]

Communism, contrary to common misunderstandings, is not an example of Being meant to subordinate Becoming. Marx proclaims that "[c]ommunism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things."[3] It's a cliché at this point for commentators who seek to establish a fundamental link between Marxism and Christianity to identify in the future goal of communism the old idea of heaven, except transported to Earth. But communism would not be, as this would imply, the arrival of a finally stable Being which abolishes all Becoming, conflict, opposition, struggle. "[I]t is important to realize," Lenin writes, "how infinitely mendacious is the ordinary bourgeois conception of socialism as something lifeless, rigid, fixed once and for all, whereas in reality only socialism will be the beginning of a rapid, genuine, truly mass forward movement, embracing first the majority and then the whole of the population, in all spheres of public and private life."[4] This is why, strictly speaking, it's wrong to speak of the "establishment" of communism, as if it's a stable and fixed entity that we could impose on the world — communism is first and foremost a process, and *not* one which realizes some pre-determined future, but rather one which *creates* the future in the process of its own unfolding. Communism would involve the abolition of all the monolithic Beings that currently stifle our capacity for transformation and creativity — states, nations, governments — it constitutes, to the contrary, the final *unleashing* of Becoming in social life.

Joy in Activity

When the painter paints, it is not as if the activity is entirely instrumental, as if only the final result is valuable, and the act of painting is a mere means, which would be bypassed if possible. Rather, the act itself, just as much as the finished painting, is valuable-in-itself; the painting is enjoyed to the utmost in its very *process of becoming*. It is such joy in the process of becoming that Marx wanted practical activity to be increasingly characterized by. Under capitalism, all wage labour has an instrumental character; not only is the process of production itself not experienced as valuable, even the finished product itself is valued only as a means — a means to the paycheck or to increased capital.

Because we have been socialized under capitalism, it is difficult for us to even *think* that most productive activity could be anything but a mere means. And yet, even under capitalism, whenever we have sufficient free time, we can find a wealth of examples of productive activity that is performed to fulfil needs, and yet is valued in-itself. The person who gardens, and thereby not only relaxes but is enriched in one's practical knowledge of plants and also pleased aesthetically; the person who cooks food for friends and family, and thereby tries a new recipe, and finds joy not only through the developed sense of taste, but the social aspect of eating with others; the person who builds a swing set for one's children, or a doghouse for a pet; even seemingly gruelling activities are enjoyed and done without pay when one can see them benefiting one's loved ones, one's community, or even a stranger in need. All of these activities are surely instrumentally valuable, but they are also valued and enjoyed in themselves,

because they fulfil the four characteristics that Marx once listed in his notes as characterizing productive activity under socialism.

In such activity, 1) the individual sees their personality embodied in the results produced, and sees their individuality objectively realized, such as the tailor who sees themselves reflected in the clothes they design; 2) in seeing the finished product benefitting others, seeing others use it and enjoy it, the individual finds satisfaction in the fulfilment of human needs; 3) in seeing others enjoy one's creation, the individual simultaneously feels their own value and self-worth affirmed by others; their value as creator is verified by the people enjoying the creation, "confirmed in [their] thought and in [their] love;" 4) finally, in seeing my individuality reflected in the people enjoying my product, I see their individuality likewise reflected in mine, and our products become "like so many mirrors, each one reflecting our essence."*

Marx expresses in these notes an idea that we likewise find in Nietzsche: that I affirm myself *in relation to others*. "You great star!" Zarathustra says to the sun, "What would your happiness be if you had not those for whom you shine?" The sun in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* symbolizes an abundance of power, which bestows itself to others and is reflected in them, and is thus affirmed. "Bless the cup that wants to flow over, such that water flows golden from it and everywhere carries the reflection of your bliss!"[1]

It should be clear from the notes referred to above that Marx does not conceive productive activity under socialism as characterized by higher wages, or denying oneself in favour of the "common good," or God forbid, subservience to the state. He conceives of it first and foremost as something that affirms and empowers the individual, as an eruption of love and joy, production "in a human manner." Any "socialism" that finds this unimportant is only a nihilistic socialism.

A world in which most activity has this character is possible. The alienation-through-activity that most of us experience is not a fact of life but something historically conditioned. Under capitalism, it results from the fact that our workplaces provide no means for decision-making, for conscious planning, or avenues for personal development, and even social fulfilment is obstructed because the endpurpose of our activity appears as the acquisition of money rather than the fulfilment of human need. Capitalist socialization urges us to deny life, to believe that enjoying it thoroughly is impossible; let us resist this. The obstacle is capital and wage-labour.

* The section from Marx is worth quoting in full: “Supposing that we had produced in a human manner; in his production each of us would have doubly affirmed himself and his fellow men. (1) I would have objectified in my production my individuality and its peculiarity, and would thus have enjoyed in my activity an individual expression of my life and would have also had — in looking at the object — the individual pleasure of realizing that my personality was objective, visible to the senses and therefore a power raised beyond all doubt; (2) in your enjoyment or use of my product I would have had the direct enjoyment of realizing that by my work I had both satisfied a human need and also objectified the human essence and therefore fashioned for another human being the object that met his need; (3) I would have been for you the mediator between you and the species and thus been felt by you and acknowledged as a completion of your own essence and a necessary part of yourself, and I would thereby have realized that I was confirmed both in your thought and in your love; (4) in my expression of my life I would have fashioned your expression of your life, and thus in my own activity have realized my own essence, my human, communal essence. In such a situation our products would be like so many mirrors, each one reflecting our essence. Thus, in this relationship what occurred on my side would also occur on yours. My work would be a free expression of my life, and therefore a free enjoyment of my life. In work the peculiarity of my individuality would have been affirmed since it is my individual life. Work would thus be genuine, active property.” — Notes on James Mill, cited in David McLellan (1973) *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd. p. 99-100.

Abundance

Until now, the world has been one of lack, of scarcity, of poverty in every sense. Humans respond to this scarcity by denying themselves, by refusing to want more, by delaying the joy of life in order to accumulate. Scarcity, both of resources and of willpower, leads to self-abnegation and slave morality, to the refusal of needs and of powers; scarcity *is* weakness. One cannot *afford* to be strong in the face of scarcity, one has to calculate the costs and benefits. Hence, Nietzsche writes that "[s]lave morality is essentially a morality of utility."[1] All virtues for Nietzsche, just as all productive relations for Marx, have up to now been only means with which to deal with scarcity. Wealth and the will-to-power are constantly put aside, invested, stockpiled, rather than used up and enjoyed. Thus, life itself acquires an instrumental character, something meaningless in-itself, and is only ever given meaning by reference to something external to life, an afterlife.

But this accumulation simultaneously creates the conditions for *abundance*. Humankind has been saving up its riches for so long that they are now plentiful and ready to burst forth, and capitalists and life-deniers are doing everything in their power to keep this from happening, even if they cannot cease this process of accumulation. Life-affirmation and socialism are made possible when we unleash this abundance and take control of it, and "all the springs of co-operative wealth" are made to "flow more abundantly."[2] All virtues up to now, Nietzsche says, have been virtues of scarcity, and he anticipates a new, abundant kind of virtue — "the bestowing virtue," which "is insatiable in wanting to bestow."[3] This is why he often uses the language of overflowing — "Bless the cup that wants to

flow over …”[4] The *Übermensch* is not callous, someone who has no concern for human suffering, no interest in helping others, as crude interpretations of Nietzsche would have it. Rather, the *Übermensch* is generous out of abundance, not out of scarcity, out of pity, fear, resentment. “In the foreground [of the noble person], there is the feeling of fullness, of power that wants to overflow, the happiness associated with a high state of tension, the consciousness of a wealth that wants to make gifts and give away. The noble person helps the unfortunate too, although not (or hardly ever) out of pity, but rather more out of an impulse generated by the over-abundance of power.”[5]

The Eternal Return

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida outlines a "spectral" politics which involve the acceptance of "spectres" or "ghosts" — that which is neither present nor absent, something which is not of the present but always haunting it. The acceptance of ghosts entails responsibility both to the ghosts of the past, and those of the future: the dead as well as the notyet-born. This is prefigured in Nietzsche: responsibility to the past is represented by *amor fati*; responsibility to the future by the transvaluation of values. The two are united in the single concept of the eternal recurrence.

Amor fati ("love of fate") refers to a perspective which looks to the past from the present standpoint and views it as necessary and good, desiring *nothing* to have commenced differently — when one exercises *amor fati*, the past is retroactively affirmed as fulfilling its "purpose" of leading up to the present moment. Nietzsche most clearly engages in such an exercise in his "autobiography" *Ecce Homo*. I put "autobiography" in quotes because of how highly unconventional it is — in fact, by conventional standards, it even *fails* as an autobiography: it is highly selective and tendentious, sometimes exaggerated and sometimes omitting too much, it is purposefully partial and cares little for historical accuracy. But *all* of this is due to its standpoint of *amor fati*: in it, Nietzsche seeks to reinterpret and revise his life, to retroactively identify what was essential and necessary in it and look even at its mistakes and errors as having been necessary in his healthy development. Whatever does not contribute to the maximal affirmation of life is chipped away at, and all that remains is given purpose from the perspective of the whole. A form of teleology is recovered here, but one which does not require any reified metaphysical foundations — the telos is

given not by some divinity from the outside but is retrospectively created by the individual.

Why does this exercise correspond to responsibility to the ghosts of the past? Because, through it, such ghosts are redeemed, given meaning and purpose, justified from the standpoint of their future. *Amor fati* is an exercise in affirmation, and Nietzsche writes that when one affirms one single moment, one thereby affirms all of existence, because "nothing is self-sufficient" and "all eternity was needed to produce this one event."[1] Nietzsche thinks of *amor fati* in wholly personal terms, but there is nothing in it that forbids its expansion to historical events. Indeed, a communist revolution is an exercise in *amor fati*, insofar as it affirms not just the present, but all of history, as nothing is self-sufficient, and all of history was needed to produce this one event. As Walter Benjamin says, every successful revolution redeems the failed revolutions of the past, just as all past errors of a human individual are redeemed as they finally find their way to a resounding success. Zarathustra says: "I love the one who justifies people of the future and redeems those of the past: for he wants to perish of those in the present."[2]

The transvaluation of values corresponds to responsibility to the spectres of the future. The slave revolt in morality was a transvaluation of values, which completely inverted those that had existed previously, but its result was a life-denying one. Nietzsche anticipates a new transvaluation, equivalent to the *Aufhebung* of morality, whose values will be life-affirming and power-generating, and which will be heralded by the rise of the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche himself did not believe that he would live to see the coming of the *Übermensch*, but this did not stop him from reaching towards its heights, as he knew that life continues beyond him — "I love the one who works and invents in order to build a house for the overman and to prepare earth, animals and plants for him: for thus he wants his going under."[3] There is a common disagreement among commentators concerning

Nietzsche's ideal of the *Übermensch*: some interpret it as a definite goal which one day could be reached, fulfilled, and enjoyed — the arrival of the *Übermensch* as an identifiable event. Others interpret it as a permanent, continuous ideal — the *Übermensch*, on this interpretation, is not an ideal to be *achieved*, but one to always strive for; it can never be reached and isn't meant to be, but one nevertheless strives further and further towards perfection. It is the carrot on the stick which pushes humanity onwards to greater and greater heights with no definite end goal. One does not have to take a side on which interpretation is correct to make the current point. Whether the *Übermensch* is a definite goal or an unattainable ideal should not make a difference in how enthusiastically we strive for it and reach towards it. One could even believe *for certain* that the ghosts of the future will be granted no opportunities, that they will live in miserable conditions, or that their parents will be swallowed in a sea of disasters, and they will never come to exist at all, and even this would not exempt us from responsibility to the future, as a future remains and stretches on no matter how many present moments arrive and pass us by.

Finally, this "spectral ethics," as we may call it, is unified in the notion of the eternal recurrence — the idea that every event in existence will happen again and again, returning eternally. Whether we take the recurrence as a literal cosmological hypothesis (as Nietzsche did in his unpublished notebooks), or an existential thought experiment (as first presented in *The Gay Science*), the idea that our lives will repeat on and on, again and again, endlessly, identically, in all of their details, both good and bad, challenges us to struggle to our limits to affirm not just the present, but the past and the future, because we will repeatedly re-live all three. The affirmation of the past is crucial not just as a piece of history, but as something that will return, and the affirmation of the future concerns something that itself will one day be past. The thought of the eternal recurrence forces us to view even *ourselves* as the ghosts towards which we are responsible, as our very

individuality itself resides in both past and future, and will return as it was, is, and will be. The eternal return is an ideal of agency, as it elevates one's actions to the perspective of eternity — the person who has affirmed the eternal return sees themselves as generating the eternal at every step, as the future we create will eventually lead into the past that created us. With the eternal return, every one of our steps is given infinite weight, and one that cannot be relieved by reference to any pre-determined end-goal, as the eternal return precludes the possibility of an absolute *telos*.

It is not for nothing that Nietzsche proclaimed the eternal recurrence as one of his central concepts, and, indeed, his highest formula of affirmation. It is the formula of tragic heroism, and socialists need it more than anyone. If it were possible to witness in one image the entirety of the history of emancipatory struggle, could any socialist look at it without being moved to tears? Endure it without being overwhelmed to the point of madness? The piles and stacks of corpses, tall enough to build barricades around state and capital. The ink and the bullets spilled. The hopes maintained so strongly until the very end, never to be redeemed. The endless imagination and creativity, the architecture of the future, and the real hands laying down brick by brick in the present. The solidarity, strong enough to form bonds across nation, gender, race, and age, between complete strangers. The countless lives dedicated to struggling for improvements achieved only too late, and the sacrifices made without success. The even bigger number of lives dedicated to *preventing* social horrors, slavery, incarceration, and genocide — struggles whose fruits were almost never enjoyed by the ones struggling, whenever they bore fruit at all. How could one accept the hypothesis that all of this, including the suffering and the mental anguish, the unfulfilled hopes and failed revolutions, the cries for help never answered, and the fears only extinguished in death, will repeat again and again for all eternity? How could one *genuinely* accept it without breaking

down? “Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus?”[4]

The German communist leader Rosa Luxemburg embodied courage and bravery in the face of this existential horror, affirming life to the utmost nevertheless. Her life exemplifies the absurdity of the world, as she came to be killed for leading a workers’ revolution, under the orders of the Social Democratic Party, which itself claimed to be acting on the behalf of workers, and despite this, we can say that she lived life joyfully, and affirmed her life to the utmost. While in jail for opposing the First World War, she wrote in a letter in 1916: “To be a human being is the main thing above all else. And that means to be firm and clear and cheerful, yes, cheerful in spite of everything and anything, because weeping is the business of the weak. To be a human being means joyfully to toss your entire life in the giant scales of fate if it must be so, and at the same time to rejoice in the brightness of every day and the beauty of every cloud … The world is so beautiful in all its horror, and would be even more beautiful if there were no weaklings and cowards on it.”[5]

This is the stance on which life-affirmation turns, and for a socialist living in the present day, taking this stance is all the more difficult. Today’s revolutionary socialists look back to a past in which the revolutionary movement was a much more powerful force — bigger not only in numbers, but more spontaneous and creative, more organized and effective, more eager and hopeful. The sum of the revolutionary movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tower over us, and what currently exists, though never completely subsiding, pales in comparison. And yet, despite that, those movements *failed*. If movements that much more powerful than ours not only failed to bring about socialism, but failed to even secure the reforms they had won, to prevent the rise of neoliberalism, what hopes could we possibly have today? Does it not make all the lives that struggled,

fought, suffered, and died for human emancipation seem even more meaningless, even more absurd, even more pointless and depressing?

The eternal recurrence steps in at this point and manifests itself as a question: if life, in all of its details, "every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great"[6] must return to you, what kind of life would you prefer to return to? Would you prefer to spend your present in resignation, so that each time it returns you would have to live in wretched complacency once again, made worse by how *unsatisfactory* it is, with the thought that you could have changed things for the better gnawing at you? Or would you prefer to live out your present in a tragic battle, struggling no matter how dim the light of hope is, and know that, even if you failed in the end, you are certain that you did all you could?

Unleashing the Will-to-Power

In June 2020, a group of people in Bristol collectively decided to tear down a statue of the slaveowner Edward Colston and dump it in the nearby harbour. In isolation, the political consequences of this act may be small, and perhaps the act itself is merely symbolic, but what we saw in this simple collective act was, on a small scale, the reabsorption of a collective's social powers back into itself, a refusal to separate one's social powers from oneself in the form of political representation; in short, the refusal to have one's powers *alienated*. The same act in Nietzschean terms would be a call-back to the masters' instinctive and spontaneous discharge of instincts onto the external world that Nietzsche described in *The Genealogy of Morals* as the "instincts of freedom." The group of people that decided the statue must be brought down did not go about it by signing a petition or calling a representative; they did not transfer their powers to a bureaucracy, granting it the legitimacy to undergo the process of deliberation and execution for them. *No!* They wanted their will-to-power reflected in the world around them, and they affirmed this instinct, shaping the world accordingly. The act was far from revolutionary, but it contained within it the seed, no matter how small, of a world affirmed as will-to-power: a world that is not alienated from itself; a world that isn't cleaved between the will and that which represses it.

Immediately, life-deniers of all kinds emerged into the sunlight to complain that the statue was not removed by democratic procedure, by which they mean *bureaucratic* procedure; they complained, in other words, precisely that people did not *alienate their social powers from themselves*, did not alienate their capacity for decision-making. Only when you equate

democracy with bureaucracy can you argue that the people, whose immediate surroundings the statue occupied, making a collective, active, spontaneous decision is *less* democratic than the decision to produce the statue in the first place.

But an even more common complaint was that the act disrespects history, that it destroys a valuable emblem of our past, that it prevents us from having knowledge of the past. What sort of history is being referred to here? Nietzsche, in *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, helpfully distinguishes between three types: monumental, antiquarian, and critical history. It would seem that what is being referred to in this case is antiquarian history — history whose sole purpose is to *preserve* the past, to record it, to archive it — the antiquarian historian is one who would like to leave *nothing* unrecorded.

But immediately there is a problem. Would an antiquarian historian, in one's occupation *as* antiquarian historian, decide to record a historical fact by the deployment of a statue? That seems woefully inefficient. No, it is not antiquarian history that is expressed in a statue, it is *monumental* history. Monumental history cares less about archiving accurate historical fact, and more about producing idols, glorifying figures, venerating events, commending institutions — in short, setting forth an ideal, and a statue is a very intuitive way to do it. A statue does not just say "remember me," it invites you to worship it. The historical question then becomes: Do we want to worship a slaveowner?

But suppose our objector convinces us that the statue *is* in fact a piece of antiquarian history. Perhaps it was intended to be monumental in its conception, but our vastly different historical context, combined with our assured contemporary revulsion at slavery, *implies* that we no longer view this bronze figure as a monument, but rather as an antiquarian reminder of what *used* to be deemed fit for a monument. If this argument is sound,

would it succeed in justifying the statue? Is its antiquarian status *better* than a monumental one would be?

Nietzsche does not pick a favourite among the three types of history. In fact, he believes all of them to be necessary. However, what he *does* warn us against is letting any one of the three types *overpower* the others, letting it go *beyond* the appropriate bounds assigned to it. An imbalance in any direction threatens to make an affirmative way of life impossible.

But what could possibly go wrong if we emphasize the antiquarian too much? “[F]or the antiquarian sense each single thing is too important. For it assigns to the things of the past no difference in value and proportion which would distinguish things from each other fairly.”[1] Monumental history is capable of affirming — selecting that which it deems worthy of monument and worship. Critical history is capable of negating — selecting that which it deems worthy of criticism and rejection. However, antiquarian history, left to its own devices, is incapable of selection — it is only capable of preserving and accumulating data, which increases without judgement or value to the point where it becomes not just useless, but actively harmful to our ability to orient ourselves in the world. Since Nietzsche’s time, this excess of antiquarian data has expanded to a dizzying extent, and was described more recently by Baudrillard as an increase in information corresponding to an equivalent *de*crease in meaning.

“Antiquarian history itself degenerates in that moment when it no longer inspires and fills with enthusiasm the fresh life of the present. Then reverence withers away.” “Thus, antiquarian history hinders the powerful willing of new things; it cripples the active man, who always, as an active person, will and must set aside reverence to some extent.”[2] The protesters, then, engage in critical history when they negate the statue that isn’t worthy of reverence. They prevent that life-denying threat that a bloated antiquarian history has of hindering the willing of new things. It sweeps

away the ruins of the past so that something new could be built in their place.

Today, the majority of conservatives and reactionaries, excepting the minority in actual positions of power granted by the state and capital, have neither the power nor the will to discharge their instincts outwardly, lest they come into conflict with the law — their tablet of holy commandments. Many of them will call for even *more* alienation, for the state to subsume an even *greater* section of the world under its repressive mechanisms. We can better understand their self-induced alienation, their form of the will-to-power, by analogy with *The Genealogy of Morals* and its analysis of the ascetic ideal.

The slaves, being incapable of attacking their masters directly, express their will-to-power through an imaginary revenge — the development of a worldview according to which the order of superiority is reversed — the masters, who have superior power in reality, become sinful and therefore destined for hell, and the slaves, who have inferior power in reality, become virtuous and therefore destined for heaven. The thirst for revenge is quenched through the satisfying belief that one's enemies lack the moral worth you possess, and are destined for a future of eternal suffering. However, as weakness is thus transformed into virtue and strength into sin, the slaves are now motivated by their own belief system to deny even the instincts they *can* discharge externally, and to exacerbate their weakness beyond the initial weakness that they started out with. The weaker the slave becomes, the more they suffer, and the more they suffer, the more they believe that they are being punished by God, that is, that they *deserve* to suffer, i.e., *deserve* to be weaker. Hence the peculiar nature of the slavish ascetics' will-to-power: in trying to express their will-to-power, they only *weaken* it, descending into a downward spiral.

This dynamic is structurally similar to the one Ludwig Feuerbach identified with regard to humanity and religion. The more humanity devotes

to religion, the more it attributes its own human qualities to a divine being, the less it retains for *itself* — the more power humanity attributes to God, the more power it *denies* to itself. Marx applied this scheme to the capitalist productive process: the more the wage worker labours, the more they increase their productivity, the more is their labour alienated from them in the form of capital belonging to someone else — the capitalist; the more value is added to capital, the smaller is the fraction given to the worker. So, abstracting from these specific examples, the general dynamic of this cycle of alienation is such: the more one exerts oneself, the more one empowers an alien force, and becomes weaker in the face of it. This is the case for Nietzsche's slavish ascetic too: the more the slave affirms oneself as virtuous, the more they empower the ascetic ideal — a sociopsychological force beyond their control — and the weaker they become.

This is the pattern suffered by the members of the working class who identify with a reactionary or conservative ideology. They express their will-to-power by supporting a repressive state or party (perhaps they do so because they hope to be given an advantage vis-à-vis various minorities), and yet the more they empower their political party, the less power they retain. This is the paradox expressed by the conservative who explains that they own a gun in case of government tyranny but supports the militarization of the very police who would take their gun away should the government order it. They exert their power by transferring it to an entity that they believe acts on their behalf, and yet operates beyond their control. The more they empower the police force, the military, the bureaucracy, the smaller they become under its shadow. Thus an already weak nature is weakened even more, the lack of external discharge is intensified, meaning that their aggression is internalized even further, which fuels the resentment well-known among politics of this stripe — resentment which often manifests as sexual pathology — the most direct and explicit denial of life, so prevalent especially in today's right-wing youth: "preaching chastity is a

public incitement to anti-nature. Every contempt for sex, every effort to dirty it through the concept of 'impurity' is a crime against life itself — it is the true sin against the holy spirit of life."[3]

In *The Genealogy*, Nietzsche describes an ancient process, wherein the instincts of the free were for the first time "forcibly made latent," "forced back, repressed, incarcerated within itself and finally able to discharge and unleash itself only against itself," a "huge amount of freedom" had "been driven from the world" in this process.[4] And, to be sure, not just reactionaries, but many left-radicals too, lacking the power to discharge their instincts externally, have had no choice but to express them inwardly, against themselves, locked within a carceral psyche. Thus, outward political engagement could only give way to self-criticism, ritualized guilt, and at best wishful fantasies of what will happen when "our turn comes." What these developments culminate in is what Nietzsche calls the "last man" — the person who no longer strives after anything, who has no sense of greatness, who never risks, and desires little more than simple pleasures and security. Nietzsche mistakenly saw the last man as a portrayal of the human being in socialist society, but it is capitalism that creates the last man, and tends towards the expansion of the condition Mark Fisher called "depressive hedonia,"[5] in which one is unable to do anything except pursue pleasure.

But then there are moments when, like a bolt of lightning, the will-to-power sparks forth, setting cities aflame, occupying territories, shaping the world according to its whims. What had been imprisoned inwardly is suddenly released out into the external world, expressed in anger so empowering it becomes *joyful*, in a negation so thorough that it becomes *affirmative*. Just when it had seemed like the last man had enjoyed his final silent victory, the possibility of the *Übermensch* once again opens up. "I say to you: one must still have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star. I say to you: you still have chaos in you."[6] Yes! Finally we can

repeat Zarathustra's words and believe in them — you still have chaos in you! The suffering that people have been put through all this time does not just evaporate into nothingness, it is transformed into material for sculpting, it generates the tension that slowly but surely begins pulling back the string of the bow, preparing to shoot the arrow of humanity. The string of the bow has not yet forgotten how to whirr. "It is time that mankind plant the seed of their highest hope."[7]

> The great liberation comes for those who are thus fettered suddenly, like the shock of an earthquake: the youthful soul is all at once convulsed, torn loose, torn away — it itself does not know what is happening. A drive and impulse rules and masters it like a command; a will and desire awakens to go off, anywhere, at any cost; a vehement dangerous curiosity for an undiscovered world flames and flickers in all its senses. "Better to die than to go on living *here*" …
>
> — Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*[8]

The last man seeks only simple pleasures and security; but the rioters are no longer satisfied with simple pleasures, and security is useless when there is nothing left worth securing. The last man says "We invented happiness," but the rioters no longer want it — their happiness is not nearly *joyful* enough. The last man moralizes and calculates: he deems revolution to be too risky, and its transgressions to be immoral, but the rioters *want* to risk and they *want* to transgress. Their will-to-power demands it.

A Preface to the Ending

My philosophy, if that is what I am entitled to call what torments me down to the roots of my nature, is no longer communicable, at least not in print.

— Nietzsche, Letter to Franz Overbeck, 1885[1]

All social life is essentially practical. All the mysteries which lead theory towards mysticism find their rational solution in human praxis and in the comprehension of this praxis.

— Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*[2]

Given the type of philosophy I have tried to introduce in this book, I am driven to return here to what the book started out with: our philosophy's constitutive relation to practice. How is it possible to have a philosophy that, as Nietzsche said, is "no longer communicable in print"? We can begin answering this by taking a look at Nietzsche's radical view of language, put forth in an early text from 1873, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*. People often think of language as involving pre-existing concepts which correspond to an external reality, and words are seen as merely placing a sign on these pre-existing concepts. Here, the concept is merely presupposed, when it in truth arises at a very late stage of development. For Nietzsche, the word is initially only a representation in sound of a nerve stimulus. Language, he argues, first arises when a given nerve stimulus is transposed into a sound, such that it is always by nature *metaphorical*. For instance, the nerve stimuli caused when one sees a wolf are transposed into a generalized sound, which, upon repeated use eventually coagulates into the concept "wolf." This means that words are not simply reflections of an external reality, but *relationships* between beings and things (e.g., the human and a wolf) expressed metaphorically. That is the "how" of language. The "why" of language is the social function it serves: it

expresses relationships between beings and things vocally to make cooperation between humans easier. Truth and lie, therefore, do not originally refer to whether a concept corresponds to external reality or not (which is a very late formulation) but rather to whether it accommodates social cooperation or not, whether it facilitates social norms or not. Initially, language either serves social functions or it does not, and it is only over time, through repetition, that the concept “true” begins to denote the former, and “false” the latter.

> What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms — in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power;
>
> — Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*[3]

What is the significance of this account? That it situates language itself in the realm of social relations. Philosophy is traditionally conceived as linguistic, and various linguistic exchanges are said to tackle philosophical problems. But if linguistic exchanges themselves at bottom consist of social relations being expressed in a metaphorical manner, then to engage in those social relations *directly can itself be a way of tackling philosophical problems, merely without the mediation of language*.

We arrive, therefore, through a different route, at the same conclusion as Marx, when he argued in his doctoral dissertation that philosophy must become worldly, and the world must become philosophical. If there is an essential link between philosophy and social relations, then it is possible to cut out the middleman called language, and *address philosophical problems by addressing social relations*.

Take, for instance, the philosophical problem of the relation between subject and object, which has defined modern philosophy since Descartes. German Idealist philosophy was strongly concerned with bridging the gap

between the two, which Kant had argued to be impossible. This is as abstract a philosophical problem as any can be, and Hegel tried to tackle it accordingly, in philosophical *language*. Yet Marx managed to reveal it as a *concrete, social problem*. The reason modern philosophy finds the subject-object relation problematic is because the subject (the real, living, producing human being) is estranged, alienated from its object (nature and its resources, which humans utilize in production). This alienation is caused by definite social relations, and is therefore a *social, political issue*. A socialist revolution, which would eliminate alienation by giving producers direct control over their means of production, would thereby *eliminate the strict separation between subject and object*. By fashioning nature according to their needs, interests, and desires, the subjects would realize themselves in the object, and thereby achieve *unity* between subject and object. A socialist revolution would therefore solve this philosophical problem by means *other than linguistic communication*; it would be a case of philosophizing with "lightning bolts," as Nietzsche put it — revolution as philosophical method.

The most *abstract* philosophical concerns become grounded in the most *concrete real-life situations and events*. The theoretical distinction between the collective and the individual, and the debate regarding which is primary, is tackled whenever *collective* social movements take to the streets to ensure the *individual's* right to existence. This is clearly displayed when Black Lives Matter, a collective movement, calls on people to "say their names" in reference to all the individual victims of police brutality, giving their individualities the kind of acknowledgement and social worth that the social relations in place had denied them. Such moments show, in a way that no academic paper could, that the problem of the primacy of the individual or the collective, is not merely a philosophical problem, but rather arises as a consequence of definite social relations: because human beings are alienated from one another, the individual experiences a rigid

separation from the collective, finding no affirmation in it, and the relation thus assumes the form of a theoretical problem; whenever this alienation is resisted, the philosophical problem thereby approaches its abolition. Likewise, when people strike in favour of ecological reform, they address the philosophical conflict between freedom and necessity: it is the very *necessity* of addressing climate change that leads them to take political action, and in the course of that action to empower themselves, and thereby to gain freedom.

It is the same with the distinctively Nietzschean problems. Nihilism, for instance, is the problem of having no meaning to one's suffering, which often leads to self-destructive responses such as the ascetic ideal, which gives the suffering meaning only by making the suffering individual into a guilty sinner who *deserves* to suffer. But when individuals use their suffering, and that of others, as fuel for political engagement and action, they thereby give their suffering meaning, as something essential to the end-goal of human emancipation, and do it in a way that conquers nihilism, as that political action simultaneously affirms their will-to-power.

> … guide the virtue that has flown away back to the earth — yes, back to the body and life: so that it may give the earth its meaning, a human meaning!
>
> …
>
> Let your spirit and your virtue serve the meaning of the earth, my brothers: and the value of all things will be posited newly by you! Therefore you shall be fighters! Therefore you shall be creators!
>
> Knowingly the body purifies itself; experimenting with knowledge it elevates itself; all instincts become sacred in the seeker of knowledge, the soul of the elevated one becomes gay.
>
> — Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*[4]

One of Nietzsche's main concerns was giving meaning to the Earth. In all previous times, such meaning was procured from a source external to the Earth, various heavens and metaphysical realms, which thereby only denigrated it. The *Übermensch* is therefore conceived of by Nietzsche as the human being capable of *becoming* the meaning of the Earth, and thereby making this meaning internal to the Earth itself — this would be a world in

which, as Marx put it, the development of human powers would be an endin-itself. The project of realizing this, for Nietzsche as for Marx, is nothing if not an *international* one. Even when Zarathustra emphasizes that each people have a different set of "good" and "evil" — a different tablet of values, and that a unique tablet of values is even a condition for a peoples' self-preservation, he ends the section by noting that, while there have been to date thousands of goals on Earth just as there have been thousands of peoples, *one* goal is still missing — "Humanity still has no goal," but "if humanity still lacks a goal, does it not also still lack — humanity itself?"[5] This makes it undeniably clear that, for Zarathustra, the revaluation of values, the coming of the *Übermensch*, is an internationalist goal. It could never be found in the petty politics of nationalism. The *Übermensch* is the meaning of the *Earth*, after all, not of this or that nation. What must be sought, therefore, is something that could unite all of humanity under a single goal. Or, in more precise terms, unite all of *un*-humanity under a single goal — the proletariat represents "the total loss of humanity," and can therefore "redeem itself only through the total redemption of humanity."[6] What could such a goal be, if not something identified with reference to capitalism — the first and only system that has successfully covered the entire globe, and made every people share in the same social relations? Only a system of this scale and magnitude could give the world its *one* goal — and because this goal cannot be the maintenance of what already exists, it must necessarily be the *annihilation* of this system, for "[w] hoever must be a creator always annihilates."[7]

The goals expressed in this book are ambitious, and some would say unreasonable, but mass movements have never won any significant victories by being "reasonable," as it is always the regime in power that sets the standard for what "reasonable" is, and the flame of unreason always starts out small. At every step, we must demand not only more than they are willing to concede us, but more than they are *capable* of conceding us, such

that the limitations of the present society are exposed and pushed towards their breaking point. After all, at the moment, it is the ruling class which demands of us more than we can give — what is “reasonable” to it is the sacrifice of thousands upon thousands to a global pandemic and impending climate catastrophe. In such a case, being unreasonably ambitious is the bare minimum. One may doubt whether a global revolutionary movement is still possible, but one cannot doubt that it is necessary.

In 2020, Black Lives Matter protesters, resisting police brutality, managed to make entire regions cop-free, setting up food distribution centres, community defence groups, even commandeering a hotel to house the homeless; people in Lebanon resisted an unaccountable government by occupying foreign ministries, forcing the entire cabinet to resign; workers in Amur, Russia, who were systematically deceived, cheated out of pay, and kept in unsafe conditions, rose up by occupying an entire village; Belarussians responded to government corruption with the largest case of anti-government unrest in the country’s history; with the spread of a global pandemic, opposing class interests have become all the more defined, and precipitated vast increases in workers’ strikes, tenant strikes, and university strikes — every day a new will-to-power threatens to burst forth and overflow in active revolt. Each such struggle brings with it an awareness of the power that resides in us, which, even lacking guns, wealth, and formal political power, makes possible powers unmatched by decades of representative electoral politics. All such struggles are cases of individuals attempting to affirm and empower themselves, driven by their most personal concerns, reacting to the most unique circumstances of life that each one faces; and yet, in doing this, they tackle problems of a universal character, which unite them with populations around the entire globe. In all such situations of mass awakening, life-deniers will try to undermine the powers that have been unleashed, to repress them, redirect them into asceticism and self-destruction, turn them back around on the very people

exercising them — force them into reformist compromises with the state. But in resisting such repression, every struggle, every flame thus kindled has the potential to expand itself across the entire globe, to unite with all kindred struggles across nations, and transform itself into a world-historical event, giving meaning to the Earth.

Socialism and life-affirmation are not fantasies or ideals that we dream up or pluck from the sky to then impose onto the world. Rather, they are real immanent historical possibilities, made possible, and even necessary, by already-existing conditions. The tendencies which move towards socialism and life-affirmation already exist, just as the tendency towards the blooming of a flower already exists in its seed, and there is not a day on Earth that individuals do not struggle to extend them. At the same time, there is nothing inevitable about such development, as countertendencies always threaten to crush the seed before it grows. All we need is to kindle the tendencies of affirmation, to further them, and unleash their unfolding until they realize their most joyful potential. I end on this note to emphasize that, strictly speaking, this work of philosophy does not end on the book's final pages. If it ends at all, it will end beyond all books, where the philosophical problems brought up here are tackled at their source: the social relations that produce and maintain them.

Notes

1 Fourier, Charles (1808) *The Theory of the Four Movements*, trans. Ian Patterson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 47.

Introduction

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